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NO. 165

THE U.S. NAVY AND THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY
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THE U.S. NAVY AND THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

A Trident Scholar Project Report

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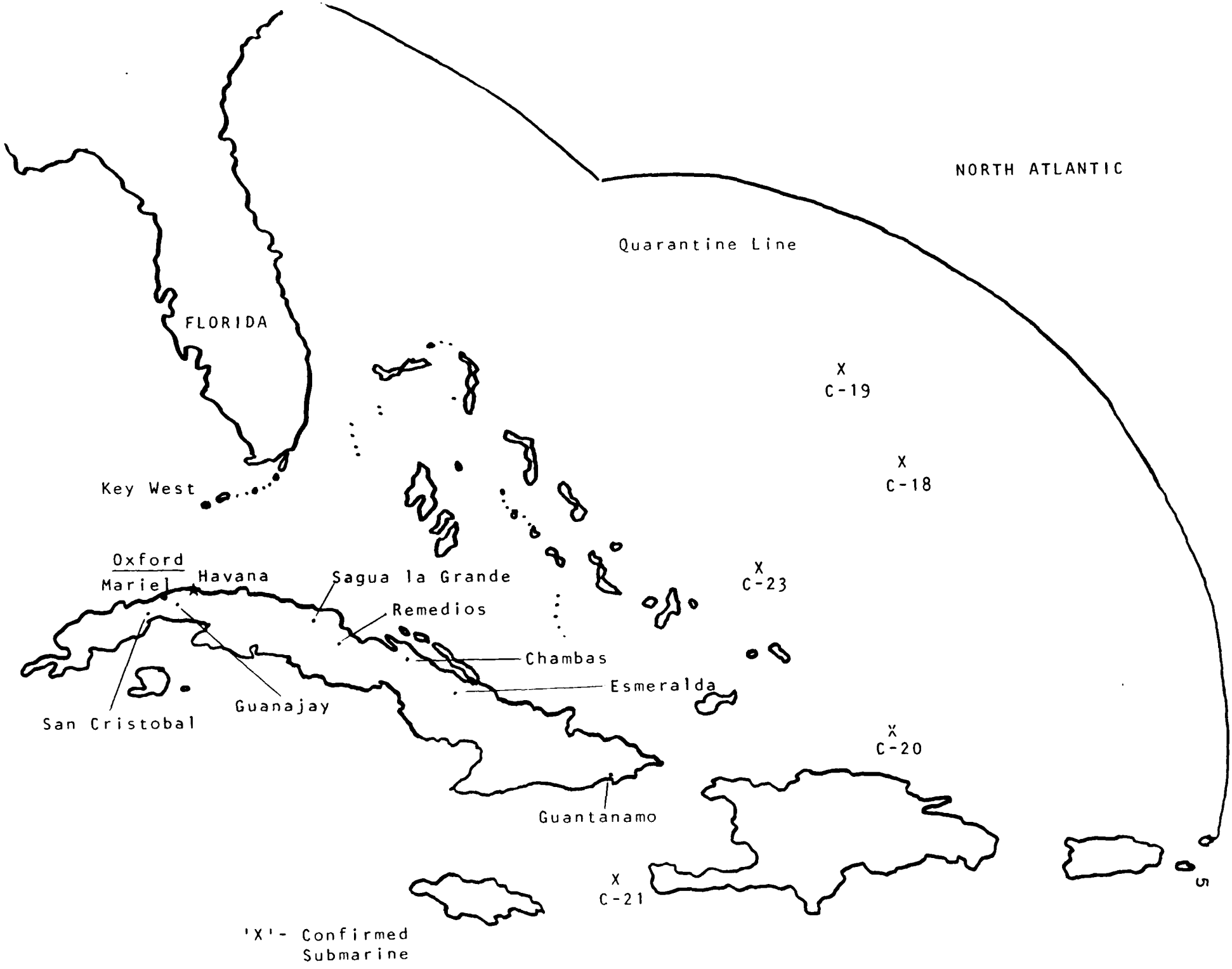
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Chapter One

On the night of 15 February 1898, five years after the start of the Cuban revolt against Spanish rule, the battleship Maine, riding at anchor in Havana Harbor as a show of President McKinley's resolve to protect American lives and property, exploded and quickly sank to the soft bottom, taking with her more than half of her crew. A cursory examination of the Maine's wreckage yielded the dubious conclusion of Spanish treachery, and the resulting public uproar moved McKinley to act. He first attempted to coerce the Spaniards out of Cuba, but they refused his demand for Cuban independence, free of Spanish control. In April, after repeated attempts at a negotiated solution, McKinley, armed now with a Congressional mandate, ordered the Army and Navy to oust the Spaniards from the island. Commodore George Dewey's Asiatic squadron crushed the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay on 1 May, and soon after Rear Admiral William Sampson's Atlantic Squadron bottled up Admiral Pascual Cervera's cruisers in Santiago harbor. On 3 July, Cervera's ships were sunk or run aground by Sampson's battleships, and Santiago capitulated shortly thereafter. McKinley's threat to send an American squadron across the Atlantic to bombard Spain's poorly defended coastal ports finally convinced Madrid to sue for peace in August. The Spanish-American war resulted in Cuba's independence and the acquisition of the Philippines, Puerto

Rico, and Guam, transformed the United States into a global power, and signalled an increased American interest in policing the Caribbean and Latin America.[1]

In the years that followed, Washington took steps to ensure American hegemony throughout the region. In 1902, the Army's occupation force handed over the government of Cuba to the newly-elected administration of Tomas Estrada Palma, thus marking the birth of the Republic of Cuba. Wary of relinquishing total control, however, Washington forced the Cuban government to incorporate the Platt Amendment into its constitution before the occupation force was withdrawn. This amendment permitted the United States to intervene in Cuban affairs and established Cuba as a virtual American protectorate. Teddy Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson cited the Platt Amendment upon sending naval squadrons to Cuban waters and landing Marines to restore order in Havana. The Platt Amendment also provided for the American lease on Guantanamo Bay, situated astride the Windward Passage in southeast Cuba, and its use as a naval base. Guantanamo was a key to establishing American hegemony in the Caribbean, displacing the British, and menacing the Germans during the 1903 Venezuelan affair. The acquisition of the Panama Canal Zone that year and the enunciation of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904 -- which endowed the United States with the right to police the Western Hemisphere without European

interference -- enhanced Guantanamo's value. Over the next three decades, Navy and Marine forces occupied Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic to restore order and protect American interests under the provisions of the Roosevelt Corollary.

In the late 1920s, Herbert Hoover laid the foundation for Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1933 enunciation of the Good Neighbor Policy which was intended to reduce America's military presence in the Caribbean, owing to the absence of any threat of European intervention, and to stem a tide of anti-American nationalism in Latin America. FDR reaffirmed this new line at the Montevideo Conference and had Congress abrogate the Platt Amendment in 1934, although the Navy held on to its base at Guantanamo. He could not remain aloof from Cuban politics, however. In September 1933, Sergeant Fulgencio Batista led a revolt of non-commissioned officers which ousted President Carlos Manuel de Cespedes and turned over the presidency to Ramon Grau San Martin. Cuba's presidency changed hands four times between 1933 and 1940, but Batista was the central figure in each new cabinet. A new constitution went into effect in 1940, and Colonel Batista was finally elected president, but it allowed him to serve only one term in office. After four years, he retired to Miami, where he watched corruption and discontent grow in Cuba throughout the late forties. Returning in 1952, Batista declared himself a candidate for

the presidency, even though his chances for victory were considered slim. But he capitalized on the loyalty of the Army's junior officers and seized power on 10 March 1952.[2]

Hard upon Batista's coup his opponents began to scheme to oust him. One of the first plotters, Fidel Castro, a student at the University of Havana, spent two years in jail for trying to seize the Moncada Barracks in Santiago. Upon his release, Castro and a small band of his followers fled to Mexico, reorganized their movement, returned to Cuba in 1956, and established a base in the Sierra Maestra Mountains on the eastern end of the island. A bitter guerilla war ensued. Castro's struggle quickly gained the support of the peasantry, many of whom fled their homes to join the rebel leaders, and Batista's American-backed regime turned to a campaign of terror to suppress the insurrection.

President Eisenhower at first supported Batista's dictatorship on the grounds that his regime protected American investments in Cuba and that Castro's forces were too weak to win. Arms and training were provided to Batista's army, while the CIA helped the dictator's secret police weed out cells of communist activity. Cuban economic life was dominated by American companies, who controlled over a third of the island's lucrative sugar trade and held substantial shares of the electric, mining, oil, and telephone industries. However, the CIA

underestimated the hatred for Batista, even among the influential Cuban middle class, although Washington assumed that no Cuban regime would be so foolhardy as to alienate the United States.[3]

At length, Batista's brutality moved Eisenhower to shut off the export of arms to Cuba, with the result that the dictator's regime gradually crumbled. Castro's army defeated the remnants of Batista's forces on the island at Santa Clara in late 1958, and so cleared the way for Castro's triumphant entry into Havana on 1 January 1959. Mobs turned out to greet their bearded liberators. Castro's 26th of July Movement was not the only Cuban faction that claimed victory, however, and other groups that had participated in the struggle against Batista now staked a claim to the country's politics. Castro, aided by his brother, Raul, and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, a close adviser, had no intention of sharing power, and Castro's faction was enormously aided by his personal charisma and his role as the leader of the anti-Batista revolution. The remaining Batistianos were rounded up, tried, and, in most cases, executed. Castro implemented a successful land reform program which cemented his popularity with the peasants, but he repeatedly postponed democratic elections. Within just over a year, he discredited the democratic left and consolidated his dictatorship.

The initial American reaction to Castro's surprising

victory was mixed. Many Americans, including Senator John Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, viewed Castro in the same light as did most Cubans, a liberator who had thrown off the shackles of an oppressive dictator. When the fatigue-clad revolutionary visited New York in April 1959, he was greeted by mobs shouting "Viva Castro," and he soothed Wall Street's fears by denying that he was a communist and declaring his respect for private property. Not everyone saw Castro as a *nuevo amigo*, however. After meeting with the Cuban leader, Vice President Nixon told Eisenhower that Castro "was either incredibly naive about Communism or under Communist discipline and that we would have to treat and deal with him accordingly." Nixon's assessment was correct. Castro had no intention of becoming an American puppet, and he gradually moved Cuba into Russia's orbit. A clash with the United States was almost inevitable.[4]

Relations between Washington and Havana soured in late 1959, and Eisenhower was truly alarmed that Cuba was becoming a Soviet satellite when Castro established diplomatic relations with Moscow. In May 1960, his fears were fully realized when a Cuban delegation headed by Raul Castro flew to Prague and Moscow to negotiate an agreement for the purchase of Warsaw Pact weapons. A sugar quota allowing Cuban sugar to enter the American market was the mainstay of the pre-Castro economy, but when Eisenhower

suspended the quota to threaten Havana, Castro retaliated by nationalizing over $1 billion worth of American investments. This sealed the economic divorce of the two countries, and on 19 December, Cuba and the Soviet Union issued a joint statement aligning Cuba with the Sino-Soviet bloc. On 3 January 1961, one day after Castro demanded a reduction in the American embassy staff, a frustrated Eisenhower declared that there was "a limit to what the United States in self-respect can endure" and severed diplomatic relations with Havana.[5]

The CIA, anticipating trouble, had begun to plan for Castro's removal in the spring of 1960. That March, Eisenhower approved a CIA plan to train Cuban exiles as guerillas for a return to the island. The centerpiece of the "Cuba Project" was the planned infiltration of trained guerillas into the Cuban countryside. The CIA's Deputy Director for Plans, Richard Bissell, devised a scheme to insert small teams of guerillas into Cuba to stir up discontent and harass Castro's army and police. What started as a relatively small-scale operation had been, by the fall of 1960, transfigured into a full-scale military operation aimed at the overthrow of the Castro regime.[6]

Shortly after the November 1960 elections, president-elect Kennedy was briefed on the operation by long-time CIA Director Allen Dulles, and Bissell, his deputy. Kennedy had sympathized with Castro before 1959, but his position

changed radically the following year when Castro began to hew to Moscow's line. During the election campaign, he berated Eisenhower for allowing Castro to establish a Soviet satellite in the Western Hemisphere. "Those who say they will stand up to Khrushchev," boomed Kennedy, "have not demonstrated any ability to stand up to Mr. Castro." Unaware of Bissell's plans and the ongoing preparations, Kennedy called for efforts "to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro." Now, on the eve of his inauguration, he had little choice but to fulfill his campaign promise. Dulles and Bissell, both eager to act, counted on this.[7]

Since the conception of his plan, Bissell refused to call on the military experts in the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assist in planning the invasion. Despite Bissell's attempt to maintain security, the JCS learned about the project. Admiral Robert L. Dennison, the commander-in-chief of the Atlantic theatre, knew that something was afoot when CIA agents approached the captain of an amphibious landing ship in Norfolk and informed him that the agency intended to requisition his vessel. A former naval aide to President Truman who was well-versed in Washington's ways, Dennison immediately telephoned the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lyman Lemnitzer, and demanded to be briefed. Lemnitzer told

Dennison he would soon find out, and at the time even he knew very little. It was not until a National Security Council meeting on 28 January that the Joint Chiefs were officially informed of the operation, and it was at this meeting that Kennedy asked the chiefs to review Bissell's plan and comment on it. The CNO, Admiral Arleigh Burke, who had known about the CIA operation since naval intelligence discovered the Cuban exile training camp in Guatemala, sat in stunned silence. While he had formed an intense dislike for Castro after a band of his guerillas seized a group of thirty Marines returning to the Guantanamo Naval Base in 1958 and demanded concessions from the United States for their release, and was an avid supporter of actions to remove the Cuban dictator, Burke took strong offense at the role Kennedy was now directing the Joint Chiefs to play. In his view, the CIA was incapable of running the military operation, and he was incensed that the JCS, who were experienced in planning and executing military operations, were being asked only to review and comment on a CIA plan. To date, Bissell had not relied on sound military advice and Burke doubted that he would agree to major modifications of his project.[8]

Burke's concerns were well-founded. The CIA, with Kennedy's blessing, refused to allow the JCS to circulate the plan within the Joint Staff, so a small committee, chaired by Army General David W. Gray, was formed to do the

work. CIA agents explained the plan to Gray's group, but they were not allowed to take notes and were given no copies of the Trinidad Plan itself, and as a result they tried to reconstruct the plan from memory so as to compile their report. The Trinidad Plan envisioned amphibious and airborne landings by a force of Cuban exiles on the southern coast of Cuba near the town of Trinidad, where opposition to Castro was thought to run high. The CIA estimated that the landing force would double in size in four days after scores of discontent Cubans joined the crusade to expel Castro. A nearby airfield was to provide support for a Cuba-based air force manned entirely by CIA-trained exiles. Once Trinidad was secure, the renegades intended to set up an opposition government that would coordinate the country-wide anti-Castro revolt that was expected to emerge. If there was no popular uprising, then the exiles planned to flee into the nearby Escambray Mountains and set up a base camp for future guerilla operations. The Gray committee, assuming complete surprise and air supremacy over the beachhead, predicted that the landing would take four days and its final report concluded that the plan had "a fair chance of ultimate success." In fact, the operation's success would depend heavily on "political factors, i.e., a sizable uprising or substantial follow-up forces." The definition of "fair," however, was never fully explained. Gray later commented that "fair"

meant a thirty-percent chance of success. Burke had little faith in the project, calling it "weak" and "sloppy," but, like the other members of the JCS, he failed to press his objections with any vigor.[9]

On 11 March, Bissell presented the Trinidad Plan to Kennedy at a NSC meeting attended by the entire JCS. Opposition to the large landing was quick to surface. It was "too much like a World War II invasion," Kennedy complained, while Secretary of State Dean Rusk feared that the scale would implicate the United States in the operation. While not forcefully opposing the operation, the JCS pointed out the military aspects upon which success hinged: surprise and air supremacy. Dulles warned that a decision must be made soon. "If we have to take these men out of Guatemala, we will have to transfer them to the United States, and we can't have them wandering around the country telling everyone what they have been doing." Moreover, if the United States backed out now, it stood to loose a good deal of prestige in Latin America. Kennedy was determined to do something, but he did not approve the Trinidad Plan. Instead, he ordered Dulles and Bissell to revise it and effect a "quiet" landing, one that would not necessitate the use of American forces or hint of Washington's involvement.[10]

The CIA, assuming that Kennedy would agree to a revised plan, now modified the Trinidad operation. Bissell

searched for other, remote landing sites where a nearby airfield might provide support for the rebel air force of B-26 bombers. Three alternate locations for the landing were presented to Gray's review committee on 14 March. Of the three, the Bay of Pigs area, near the Zapata Peninsula, was thought to be the best site for the landing because of the few access roads, small population, and a nearby airfield large enough to handle the B-26 bombers. The JCS thought that the original Trinidad location was better suited to the operation, but agreed that the Bay of Pigs was adequate. Bissell reported back to the president and explained the modified operation. Not only the landing site was changed, but also the paratrooper drop time and the amphibious resupply schedule were altered so as to "quiet" the operation. Although Bissell went over all these changes, he failed to point out to Kennedy that the Bay of Pigs, situated more than eighty miles from the Escambray Mountains and surrounded by swamps, did not provide an accessible inland line of retreat for the brigade if its initial objectives were not met. Kennedy, believing that the guerilla warfare option was still feasible, tacitly approved the plan, but reserved the authority to cancel the operation up to twenty-four hours before the landing.[11]

Critics of the plan continued to surface as D-day approached. Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles advised strongly against proceeding "with this adventure

simply because we are wound up and cannot stop." His ranks were joined by the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Arkansas Democrat J. William Fulbright, who had caught wind of the planned invasion. He pleaded with Kennedy not to proceed with the operation, which he thought was both illegal and immoral. Besides, Fulbright noted, the "Castro regime is a thorn in the flesh; but it is not a dagger in the heart," and alternative methods were available to isolate and weaken the Marxist dictator. Others, including presidential adviser Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, voiced their concerns, but none of these men were in Kennedy's inner circle and he did not take their advice. When a report arrived at the White House from Colonel Hawkins, the Marine commander of the exiles, commending the combat readiness and morale of the brigade, Kennedy told Dulles to go ahead with the operation.[12]

Operation Zapata quickly disintegrated into a fiasco. Two days before the landing on 15 April, air strikes on Castro's air force, designed to make the operation "look Cuban," alerted the dictator to the impending operation. The strikes also exposed Washington's hand, and the uproar at the UN prompted Stevenson and Rusk to urge Kennedy to cancel a second strike on the 15th and a strike scheduled in support of the main landings on the 17th. The result was that when the brigade landed, most of the Cuban Air

Force was intact. Early on the morning of 17 April, the American destroyer Eaton led the Cuban brigade's landing crafts into the Bay of Pigs. The first wave of assault troops, whose unseaworthy landing crafts were broken up by coral reefs, was met by a small Cuban militia unit stationed in the area, and this unit also transmitted news of the invasion to nearby Castro forces. Matters worsened when Castro's T-33 jet trainers, firing air-to-ground rockets, destroyed two of the landing ships in the six-ship exile fleet which was composed of craft leased by the CIA from the United Fruit Company. The surrounding peasants mobilized to meet the invaders, whom they believed to be remnants of the hated Batista police squads. Castro surged troops to the beachhead while the 1,400-man brigade frantically called for the promised air cover.[13]

Off the beaches, twenty miles over the horizon, the aircraft carrier Essex was in position, her squadron of A-4D Skyhawk attack jets perfectly suited for the ground support role. At a late evening NSC meeting on the 18th, Bissell and Dulles asked Kennedy to order the air strikes, but he refused to allow the American jets to intervene. Burke strongly protested and suggested that naval gunfire support from the offshore destroyers would also help. But Kennedy would have none of it and shot back, "Burke, I don't want the United States involved in this." "Hell, Mr. President," responded Burke, "we are involved!" Kennedy

finally authorized the A4-Ds to escort a B-26 strike on the 19th, but the bombers were ambushed before they rendezvoused with the fighters. Late that evening, the destroyers Eaton and Murray were ordered in to evacuate the brigade's survivors.[14]

The failure of the Bay of Pigs operation had many causes. Poor planning, faulty intelligence, delayed and incomplete communications, and faulty decision-making all contributed to the catastrophe. Bissell's CIA planners failed to identify the coral reefs, underestimated the depth of Castro's support, and relied too heavily on a revolt to ensure the operation's success. The change of the landing site eliminated the landward line of retreat into the mountains -- a fact that was not made clear to Kennedy. Moreover, the overriding concern for concealing the American role led to the excessive cloak of secrecy insisted upon by Bissell. It also prevented a serious examination of the operation by the Joint Chiefs, who in turn also failed to clarify the numerous military weaknesses in the plan. The first air strike merely gave Castro an early warning that something was up. Withholding the second air strike in order to protect American deniability on 15 April ensured that Castro's planes would be ready on D-day. Given the opportunity to provide air cover and secure the beachhead, Kennedy balked, repeating his earlier instruction that no American forces be

involved, something he at least thought to be clear from the beginning. Yet, Kennedy had to shoulder much of the blame. Throughout the planning and preparation stage, several serious men within the administration voiced their doubts and concerns, albeit timidly at times. Kennedy listened patiently, but his desire for action against Castro and a decisive Cold War victory clouded his thinking. A distraught president acknowledged he had "handed his critics a stick with which they would forever beat him."[15]

The catastrophe severely damaged Kennedy's confidence in the expertise and advice of the Joint Chiefs. "The first advice I'm going to give my successor is to watch the generals and to avoid feeling that just because they were military men their opinions on military matters were worth a damn," he sneered. Before cleaning house, he called in retired General Maxwell Taylor, a former Army chief of staff, to investigate the affair. Taylor was a close friend of Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and JFK was impressed by Taylor's candid criticism of Eisenhower's defense policies in his 1960 book, The Uncertain Trumpet. John Kennedy soon came to rely on Taylor as a sometime confidante and personal adviser. Joined by Robert Kennedy and Burke, Taylor presented a top secret report on the Bay of Pigs to the president on 13 June. It cited breakdowns in communications, planning, and decision-making, and

mildly reprimanded the JCS for not making their reservations clear. "They should be encouraged to express the military veiwpoint clearly and directly before the President and other high officials in the government," the authors concluded. Acting on Taylor's advice, Kennedy met with the JCS in May 1961 to define what he expected of them as advisors, and on 28 June he formally tasked them with coordinating all military and paramilitary operations, ensuring that military factors of an operation were understood, and with offering advice and opinion on matters involving a military option. While this seemed to clear the air, he nonetheless viewed JCS advice thereafter with skepticism and moved to put one of his men in charge of the group. In November, Kennedy convinced Taylor to replace Lemnitzer as JCS Chairman in July 1962.[16]

Far from retreating on the issue of Cuba after the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy renewed his efforts against Castro with a vengeance. Wasting little time, he ordered a sweeping reevaluation of the Cuban situation, which was to include reports about Soviet assistance to Cuba and recommendations as to how Washington might increase the pressure on Castro's regime. The president, as well as Robert Kennedy, his increasingly active brother, wanted action and "chewed Bissell out . . . for . . . sitting on his ass and not doing anything about getting rid of Castro and the Castro regime," according to a CIA official. The CIA's

capabilities in Cuba, however, were severely damaged by post-invasion round-ups of anti-Castro suspects, and the agency needed time to rebuild the delicate infrastructure of agents. Kennedy, frustrated at this slow pace and anxious to renew efforts against Castro, called veteran covert operator Brigadier General Edward Lansdale to the White House in the fall. Lansdale, who had opposed the Bay of Pigs operation, now produced a plan to insert small groups of trained exiles into Cuba to plant the seeds of discontent and revolt.[17]

In November, bringing together the recommendations of Lansdale and the CIA, the super-secret Special Group approved the genesis of a major new covert action program against Castro. The Special Group, a subcommittee of the National Security Council which was responsible for overseeing covert and sensitive operations, included National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, diplomat U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, John McCone, the newly-appointed CIA Director, and the Chairman of the JCS, General Lemnitzer. The new operation, code named Mongoose, combined an assortment of covert, political, economic, propaganda, and military tasks crafted so as to to chip away at, and ultimately destroy, Castro's regime. The Special Group made Lansdale its chief of operations for Mongoose and charged him with getting the program underway. To monitor the progress of the

operation, the Special Group Augmented was created by adding Robert Kennedy and General Taylor to the group's usual membership. A rough outline of the Mongoose plan was put before the president for his endorsement at the end of November, and he approved it and directed Lansdale to "use our available assets . . . to help overthrow the Communist regime." Thus, by the end of November, Kennedy had recovered from the Bay of Pigs, reorganized his diplomatic and military commands, and resumed his efforts to overthrow Castro. Humiliated by the failed operation, both Kennedy and his brother viewed the removal of Castro as a personal test, one which they had no intention of failing.[18]

The challenge of Cuba increasingly evolved into a test of wills between the Cold War superpowers and their respective leaders. A December 1961 State Department White Paper told the Organization of American States that Cuba was "a bridgehead of Sino-Soviet imperialism within the inner defenses of the Western Hemisphere," and an "appendage of the Communist system." Kennedy's policy seemed to stiffen Soviet support for Castro, however. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, having declared that "the Monroe Doctrine has outlived its time," rushed to Castro's aid. "We had an obligation to do everything in our power to protect Cuba's existence as a Socialist country and as a working example to the other countries of Latin America," he observed. To lose Cuba, "would have been a terrible

blow to Marxism-Leninsim." After the Bay of Pigs, Khrushchev increased the flow of Soviet arms shipments to Cuba and sent MiG fighters to Castro's air force, while Soviet freighters loaded up on Cuban sugar for the return trip. A communist Cuba was an important asset for the Soviet Union. Not only did Russia benefit from its trade in Cuban sugar and tobacco, but also Cuba offered the Soviets a prime location for the establishment of overseas military bases, a danger not lost on American observers.[19]

Fears that the Soviets would establish missile bases in Cuba had been brewing up in Washington for some time. The day after the failed landing attempt at the Bay of Pigs, Robert Kennedy sounded an initial warning. "If we don't want Russia to set up missile bases in Cuba," he told his brother, "we had better decide now what we are willing to do to stop it." Richard Bissell testified before a closed Congressional committee shortly after the disaster that if the Soviets "should ever build a missile base or a submarine base, we will certainly be able to find that kind of thing out promptly and with certainty." Indeed, reports of missiles in Cuba were not an unfamiliar topic among intelligence analysts. Cuban refugees had provided so many reports about missiles in Cuba that the stack of paper was five inches high. The CIA thought most of the refugees to be unreliable observers owing to their emotional bias and lack of sophistication about weapons, and many of their

reports were truly outrageous.[20]

In late 1961, the first serious report of construction relating to missile sites was relayed to Naval Intelligence by the commander of the Guantanamo Naval Base, Rear Admiral Edward O'Donnell. His report was not publicized, but in early December, Robert R. McMillan, the staff counsel to Senator Kenneth B. Keating, a Republican from New York, took a routine junket to Guantanamo where he was briefed by O'Donnell. Returning to Washington, McMillan told Keating that O'Donnell had "indicated that there is, in his opinion, conclusive evidence from intelligence sources that missiles [sic] bases are being constructed in Cuba," although it was unclear if the admiral was referring to ballistic missiles or surface-to-air missiles. Visits by congressmen and staffers to Guantanamo were routine at the time. "I doubt very much that Mr. McMillan had many sessions with me," recalled O'Donnell. "I generally gave an overall briefing for everybody there." He did, however, remember the information to which McMillan referred. "The first evidence that I had about the possibility of missile construction occurred about then. It was brought in by one of our Cuban workers and it indicated some special construction going on . . . twenty-five miles northeast of Santiago." Assessing this information as very reliable, O'Donnell passed it on to Naval Intelligence in Washington.[21]

Unbeknownst to O'Donnell, his briefing of McMillan had profound consequences in that it provided Keating with the first alert that the Soviets were sending missiles to Cuba. He pressed the Navy Department in Washington for more information about O'Donnell's report, but his queries were politely rebuffed. Now alert to intelligence on Soviet missiles in Cuba, he sometime thereafter established secret contacts in the intelligence community who fed him information throughout the following summer, just when the evidence of Soviet ballistic missiles started to mount.[22]

In early 1962, the Mongoose program to put pressure on Cuba and isolate Castro began to build momentum. In January, Lansdale disseminated a list of thirty-two planning tasks, each dealing with a different phase of the ambitious operation, ranging from intelligence collection to sabotage. "It is our job to put the American genius to work on this project, quickly and effectively," he wrote, echoing Robert Kennedy's words. "This demands a change from business-as-usual and a hard facing of the fact that we are in a combat situation -- where we have been given full command." For reasons that are not altogether clear, the president's brother had taken and would continue to take a leading role in pressing for aggressive action against Cuba. Possibly this was because Castro had embarassed the country, as well as *his* brother, and had to be dealt with.[23]

Publicly, the president ordered steps to politically isolate Castro's regime. On 22 January in Punta del Este, Uruguay, the OAS foreign ministers met to consider Cuba's place in the hemisphere. After intense American lobbying, the meeting voted fourteen to one to exclude Cuba from "participation in the inter-American system." Other approved resolutions prohibited members from selling arms to Cuba and provided for collective defense should Castro attempt to export his *revolucion*. Only days later, Kennedy slapped a trade embargo on Cuba, forbidding all exchange with the island. The political and economic measures were, for the most part, cosmetic, as Kennedy did not expect much to result from the OAS strictures and the trade embargo's effect would only be known in the long-term. At any rate, the Soviets might, if they chose, greatly compensate for the loss of American trade.[24]

Kennedy probably placed more faith in covert action than in open diplomacy and economic sanctions. By late February, the details and guidelines for Mongoose were complete. Lansdale's ambitious plan aimed to spark an open revolt of the Cuban people which would overthrow Castro by October 1962. However, at a Special Group meeting on 26 February, McNamara succeeded in scaling back the initial phase of the program to concentrate on improving intelligence capabilities. The following month, the Special Group reviewed Lansdale's guidelines for the covert

operation. Final success, he stressed, aware of the depth of Castro's support, "will require decisive U.S. military intervention." The operations currently authorized were designed to "prepare and justify this intervention." Once this was accomplished, according to Lansdale, Kennedy would have to decide whether to move to open resistance. "If conditions and assets permitting a revolt are achieved in Cuba, and if U.S. help is required to sustain this condition, will the U.S. respond promptly with military force to aid the Cuban revolt?" Kennedy deferred a decision for the moment and instead told Lansdale to focus on improving methods for collecting intelligence. On the 16th, he tacitly approved the guidelines. Mongoose went into full swing.[25]

As part of the massive operation, the CIA created a Miami station, code named JMWAVE, to control its Mongoose activities. Manned by personnel of Task Force W, the Miami station grew into an operation involving over 400 individuals, a small fleet of speedboats, over 2,000 Cuban exiles, and a $50 million dollar operating budget. JMWAVE infiltrated agents into Cuba, launched sabotage missions using Cuban exile groups, and operated an interrogation center at Opa Locka to glean information from the steady flow of Cuban refugees arriving in Florida. Other missions included contaminating sugar shipments out of Cuba and bribing foreign industrial firms to sabotage their Cuban

exports. Far from inspiring revolt, however, these sabotage activities actually had the reverse effect of galvanizing Cuban support for Castro, whose propaganda organs skillfully exploited his role as a nationalist, anti-American patriotic underdog.[26]

Cuba's political isolation by the OAS and the Mongoose activities apparently moved both Castro and Khrushchev to believe that an invasion involving American military forces was imminent. Based on reports from his own intelligence sources, Castro thought that "a direct invasion of Cuba was being seriously considered and analyzed [in Washington]." "And we, through various sources, had news of the plans being elaborated, and we had the certainty of this danger." Khrushchev as well feared that the Kennedy administration would soon move against the island. "We were sure that the Americans would never reconcile themselves to the existence of Castro's Cuba," he wrote. Large-scale American military exercises conducted during March and April undoubtedly reinforced their concerns. In early April, a naval and Marine Corps task force deployed to the Caribbean for a training assault on the island of Vieques, off the coast of Puerto Rico, and that same month, over 40,000 troops, 300 aircraft, and 79 warships participated in Operation Quick Kick off the coasts of Virginia and the Carolinas. Quick Kick was designed to test an actual military contingency plan, one of several which were being refined at Lansdale's

urging for use in Cuba. These signals led Khrushchev to later argue that it "was clear . . . that we might very well lose Cuba if we didn't take some decisive steps in her defense."[27]

The genesis of the Soviet Premier's plan to station ballistic missiles in Cuba occurred in April. Visiting the Crimea, the idea first struck him after discussions with Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky highlighted the problems the Soviet military faced owing to the presence of American Jupiter ballistic missiles across the Black Sea in Turkey. The Jupiter squadron, which arrived in Turkey during the summer of Kennedy's first year in office, were first generation, liquid-fueled missiles, which could carry nuclear weapons from their Turkish launching pad to targets in the Soviet Union.[28]

Upon his return to Moscow later in the month, Khrushchev unveiled his idea to a small circle of high-ranking officials: First Deputy Prime Minister Anastas I. Mikoyan, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Party Leader Frol R. Kozlov, Malinovsky, and Marshal Sergei Biryuzov, the commander-in-chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces. The missiles, said Khrushchev, could be deployed covertly during the summer and early fall. Once the missiles were ready to fire, the Soviets would make their presence known publicly and so present the United States with a *fait accompli*. "In addition to protecting Cuba," he pointed out, "our

missiles would have equalized what the West likes to call 'the balance of power.'" He predicted that Washington's reaction would be minimal, and that the Americans would learn to live with the ballistic missiles in Cuba much like the Soviet Union had learned to deal with Western missiles on her borders. Mikoyan objected, believing that the missiles would provoke a dangerous American reaction and doubting that the deployment could be accomplished covertly. He also questioned whether Castro would agree to such a dangerous plan. Moreover, Gromyko warned, "it will surely cause a political explosion in the USA" that would force Kennedy to take action to remove them. Khrushchev was unswayed. In the thrall of his own idea, he hardly paused to examine Kennedy's possible reaction. The plan accomplished too much, too easily.[29]

His next step was to explain it to Castro, and to do this he decided to send a secret military mission to Cuba. If the Cuban leader was opposed, Khrushchev told Mikoyan that he would abandon the matter. The small circle of officials was expanded in early May to include candidate Presidium member Sharif R. Rashidov and Aleksandr Alekseyev, the press counselor at the Soviet embassy in Havana who was slated to become the new ambassador. These two officials, along with Marshal Biryuzov, were selected to head the delegation to Cuba. In late May, just before they left for Havana, Khrushchev convened the full

Presidium and informed them of the plan. His scheme was apparently met with little resistance. He was at the height of his powers. If it succeeded, Khrushchev stood to bolster his support among party members, but failure might quicken his departure. Thus, at the end of May, the Soviet Premier embarked upon his bold and dangerous plan, convinced that an easy Cold War victory would soon be within his grasp.[30]

Chapter Two

Early diplomatic arrangements to set in motion Khrushchev's plan were made in late May. On the 30th, Alekseyev and Biryuzov led the Soviet delegation to Havana. Traveling under the guise of an agricultural mission, Alekseyev was to discuss the deployment with Castro, while Biryuzov, traveling as "engineer Petrov," scouted the Cuban countryside for suitable locations for the missile sites and determined whether the deployment could be accomplished covertly. Alekseyev relayed Khrushchev's message, telling the Cuban leader that the Soviet Union was "prepared with all possible means to assist Cuba in fortifying its defense capability, even to deploy on its territory Soviet intermediate range missiles." Castro, with fear of an American invasion a constant companion, responded favorably to the proposal. Not only would the missiles protect Cuba, but also might advance the greater cause of world socialism. After discussing the Soviet offer with Cuba's six-member Party Secretariat, Castro readily agreed to the plan. "We reached the conclusion that this was mutually beneficial," he recalled, although he realized that the missiles would spark a serious confrontation with Washington. "I was convinced that a very tense situation would be created [by the missile deployment], and that there would be a crisis," but, like his Soviet comrades, he was willing to take the risk. Marshal Biryuzov, having

completed his survey of the countryside for possible launch sites, reached the surprising conclusion that the ballistic missiles could be deployed and made operational without American knowledge.[1]

Upon returning to Moscow ten days later, Alekseyev and Biryuzov reported the results of their mission to the full Soviet Presidium. Mikoyan was opposed to Khrushchev's bold, foolish gamble, and was "amazed that Biryuzov thought there were places in the mountains where the Americans would not discover the missiles," recalled his son, Sergei. The hardened old Bolshevik was even more surprised that Castro had accepted the Soviet offer. Yet despite Mikoyan's objections, the Presidium ordered detailed plans for the deployment to be drawn up. A reciprocal Cuban mission to Moscow was scheduled to arrive in July to continue the negotiations.[2]

To complete arrangements for the deployment, Fidel's brother, Defense Minister Raul Castro, made a highly-publicized trip to Moscow on 2 July. In a series of secret meetings, only two of which were attended by Khrushchev, Raul and Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky negotiated a five-year renewable treaty providing for the stationing of Soviet medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Cuba. Accompanying the ballistic missiles would be a large contingent of Soviet ground and air forces who were both to protect the missiles and act as

a "trip wire" in case of an American air attack on the sites or an invasion. The formidable array of forces totalled twenty-four SA-2 surface-to-air missile sites, a regiment of forty-two MIG-21 interceptors, forty-two Il-28 light bombers, coastal defense cruise missiles, KOMAR-class patrol boats bearing anti-ship cruise missiles, and 42,000 Red Army combat troops. Control of the SS-4 Sandal and SS-5 Skean ballistic missiles was to remain in Soviet hands. The status-of-forces agreement was signed only by Raul and Malinovsky, and Castro and Khrushchev agreed to unveil it in November, after the American congressional elections, inasmuch as doing so before then might precipitate the very political "explosion" Gromyko feared and provoke Kennedy to act hastily and forcefully against the missile sites.[3]

The success of the Soviet gambit hinged on preventing the vigilant eyes and ears of American intelligence from uncovering Khrushchev's plan before the public announcement in November. Security during the Moscow negotiations was tight and the details of the talks were limited to a small circle of high-ranking officials on both sides. According to Sergei Mikoyan, all communications within Moscow, and between the Soviet capital and Havana, were hand carried by courier.[4]

Despite the cloak of secrecy surrounding the negotiations, American intelligence was alerted to the military nature of Raul's publicized visit. "The

composition of his [Raul's] group strongly suggested its purpose was to negotiate for more Soviet military aid," one analyst concluded. "There were rumors that the purpose of the trip was to secure a defense treaty with the Soviet Union." The lack of a communique, however, led to the conclusion that Raul's diplomacy had failed.[5]

Clearly American intelligence understood a good deal more than that about Raul's visit, the status-of-forces agreement, and other aspects of the talks. Sometime in early July, intelligence reached the president that indicated a significant change in the ongoing Soviet-Cuban negotiations. According to Commander Gerry McCabe, the president's assistant naval aide, intelligence originating from Raul's visit concurrently alerted Kennedy to Khrushchev's plan to base nuclear-capable ballistic missiles in Cuba. The "president became aware of the planned introduction of Russian nuclear missiles into Cuba sometime in early July," recalled McCabe. The commander was well-placed to know what was afoot. He was in charge of the secret White House Situation Room and he recorded his observations in a diary that he kept during his years with Kennedy. Cleared for special and compartmented intelligence, Commander McCabe's job brought him in everyday contact with both the president and McGeorge Bundy, and he attended Bundy's staff meeting at 0830 each morning and acted as a courier for sensitive information.

"Sometimes," explained McCabe, "they [the president and Bundy], would say things to me that they had no business saying and that's how I found out what Castro had gotten in the way of an agreement in the Kremlin. It didn't come to me through any channels." Based on information gleaned from code word intelligence sources, the very existence of which was known only to a select few, President Kennedy "learned that Raul Castro had agreed with Khrushchev that the Russians could install nuclear missiles in Cuba and that they could start doing it . . . in the fall."[6]

The intelligence cited by McCabe likely originated from an extremely sensitive and tightly-held source. The possibilities include communications intercepts or a highly placed spy. Sergei Mikoyan's testimony about hand-carrying the diplomatic correspondence notwithstanding, assembling the missiles, their warheads, the launching equipment, and the ships to transport them from Russia to Cuba surely caused a flurry of military and naval radio message traffic among various Soviet headquarters. Inasmuch as many of these units were concerned solely with ballistic missile operations and deployment, even the most stringent communications security regime might have been inadequate to hide the character of the endeavor. Such intercepts might have indicated that ballistic missiles were involved. Received by either the American listening post in Karamusel, Turkey or the giant "wullenweber" antenna

station at Edzell, Scotland, both operated by the Naval Security Group, such messages were deciphered, translated, and interpreted by the hyper-secretive National Security Agency and disseminated to a small group of individuals who were specifically designated by either the president or National Security Adviser Bundy. Restricted to only these individuals, the intelligence referring to ballistic missiles was unseen by analysts of agencies. "It's quite possible [the intelligence was seen only by Kennedy]," said DIA Analyst John Hughes.[7]

If the source of Kennedy's highly-secret, code name intelligence was an agent-in-place in the Kremlin, or a well-placed mole in Castro's inner circle, then the routine limiting the distribution of his product would be roughly the same. Operating from within the Kremlin walls, a spy might pass the information about the negotiations to CIA handlers in Moscow, who in turn would relay it to Washington where it was confined to a select group, possibly only a handful of CIA officials and the president. Not only did the restricted access protect the source of the information, but also it allowed Kennedy to act as he saw fit or do nothing at all. Two known possibilities present themselves. From April 1961 to September 1962, Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, an officer in Soviet Military Intelligence, passed secrets about Russian ballistic missiles to the CIA and Britain's Secret Intelligence

Service, MI6. While Penkovsky's information provided the Americans and British with a wealth of data on Soviet MRBMs, these secrets did not include information about the ballistic missile deployment to Cuba, of which Penkovsky knew apparently nothing. Another possible source about which little is known was "Donald," a high-level Soviet diplomat who began spying for the United States in 1961 and was apprehended, tried, and executed in January 1990. "Donald" passed secrets to CIA agents on nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, and diplomatic ciphers. "With access to so many state secrets, Donald was dealing in everything that the U.S. intelligence services were interested in," reported the Communist Party newspaper Pravda. While the exact source of Kennedy's top secret, code name intelligence will not be known for years -- or perhaps will never be known -- this much is clear: Sometime during early July the president was apprised of Khrushchev's plan and the fruits of Raul's visit to Moscow. He did not share this knowledge with most of his closest advisers, and moved forcefully to restrict its use by the American intelligence community.[8]

Signs reinforcing the intelligence gleaned from Raul's visit began to surface in early July, when the assemblage of shipping and military equipment began to be detected by U.S. intelligence. Orbiting high above the Soviet Union, the CORONA and SAMOS series of reconnaissance satellites

provided complete photographic coverage of the Soviet Union. From their perches in the sky, these satellites trained powerful cameras on the ports of Odessa and Leningrad, where the Soviets assembled the ballistic missiles and support equipment for shipment to Cuba. The NIE Center recorded that, in early July, photography of these areas "showed extensive dockside storage of some of the types of equipment subsequently observed on the decks of Soviet ships en route to Cuba." Given little time to sort out the logistics of the massive operation, Soviet planners were scrambling to assemble the necessary men and material and mate them with transportation to Cuba. Soviet ships, built for the Far Eastern lumber trade, were observed steaming from their homeport of Vladivostok in the Pacific and concentrating at the embarkation ports of Odessa and Leningrad. These lumber-carrying merchantmen, equipped with hatches and holds large enough to accomodate whole trees, transported the seventy-foot ballistic missiles to Cuba, deep in their holds and safe from the probing eyes of U.S. surveillance cameras.[9]

Even before Raul Castro left Moscow on 17 July, ships carrying SA-2 Guideline surface-to-air missiles, AS-1 Kennel shore-to-ship cruise missiles, and support technicians stood out of the port of Odessa on the Black Sea. Steaming through the Bosporous and the Dardanelles, the ships declared false tonnages and destinations, a

"normal indication of military cargoes" to American intelligence. Khrushchev and his high command were wary that American reconnaissance would discover what these ships were carrying, so they ordered the captains to scuttle their vessels should they be stopped by U.S. Navy warships intent upon searching for the missile equipment. Passenger liners were used to transport the technicians and the first contingents of security troops, and the commanders ordered their men to behave like tourists whenever an American patrol plane appeared overhead so as to prevent their opponents from accurately counting the number of Soviet forces bound for Cuba.[10]

Forward deployed U.S. Navy forces first detected this Soviet sealift. Operating from bases in Greece, Sicily, and Spain, Navy patrol squadrons kept a close watch on the increasing flow of outbound Soviet merchantmen, as did their counterparts in Scotland, Iceland, Nova Scotia, the Azores, and Bermuda. The arms-laden freighters were tracked through the strategic chokepoints of the Mediterranean and Baltic Seas and across the Atlantic by the long-range patrol planes. "Of course," recalled Admiral Dennison, "it wasn't limited to sightings at sea. We had intelligence sources in various parts of Europe and naval attaches all over the place" who reported the suspicious Soviet merchantmen. After which, the "ships that were coming through the Dardanelles and the Bosporous

and through Gibraltar or through the Channel, and those that came down past Iceland and off our own coast were . . . photographed." Operating closer to Cuba, P-2V Neptune maritime patrol aircraft flying out of Norfolk, Jacksonville, Key West, Puerto Rico, and Guantanamo shadowed the freighters into Cuban ports. Four times a day, the busy Neptunes flew shipping reconnaissance missions between Key West and Guantanamo and "observed every Red Bloc merchant ship that came into our waters," recalled Rear Admiral O'Donnell. "When the whole thing was over we were able to fix that we really hadn't missed any." Evidence of the early Soviet buildup led him in the spring of 1962 to deploy various types of ships, from a minesweeper to a destroyer, in the Windward Passage to report "any spot on their radar" that failed to identify itself and vector a nearby patrol plane to intercept the suspicious contact. "We picked up quite a bit of information from that small ship sailing around slowly in the Windward Passage," he observed. In July alone, Navy surveillance detected thirty Soviet merchantmen arriving in Cuba, a fifty percent increase over the month of June.[11]

This sudden change in Soviet shipping patterns alerted the American intelligence community to Moscow's increased military commitment to Castro's Cuba, although most analysts did not believe that the arms shipments included nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. There are conflicts in

the evidence on this question. Intelligence about Soviet shipping, claimed Raymond Garthoff, the special assistant for Soviet Bloc Affairs in the State Department, "played no real role in raising American suspicions about Soviet missiles." Possible tell-tale signs of ballistic missiles, particularly the large-hatch Soviet freighters, reportedly went unnoticed by American analysts. Roger Hilsman, the director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department, insisted that shipping intelligence specialists did not deem the unusual movements of these vessels, particularly the Soviet freighters Omsk and Poltava, to be especially significant. Nor did the fact that these ships were riding high in the water, characteristic of a low-weight, high-volume cargo, trouble the shipping specialists. The analysts, wrote Hilsman, did not view "these facts . . . as unusual or disturbing enough even to call attention to them, much less explain them away." Examination of naval surveillance photos of deck-loaded cargo also reportedly failed to reveal any equipment normally associated with the operation of Soviet ballistic missiles. Such equipment included missile erectors, oxidizer tank trailers, propellant trailers, and tracked prime movers. John Hughes, the Special Assistant for Reconnaissance at the Defense Intelligence Agency, noted that "analysis of the deck-loads did not reveal any MRBM support systems," all of which, he claimed, "were hull-

loaded by the Soviets." These conclusions, however, conflict with observations made by high-ranking naval officers about what the Navy learned during this early phase of the Cuban buildup.[12]

These new patterns of Soviet shipping sparked far more interest within the Navy than Hilsman or Garthoff admitted. The Soviet sealift alerted members of the CNO's and Admiral Dennison's CINCLANT staff in July, and they were clearly concerned that it was aimed at establishing ballistic missiles in Cuba. The CNO, Admiral George W. Anderson, was given a daily intelligence briefing in the Flag Plot theatre, the Navy's Pentagon command center, where, beginning in July, intelligence officers projected slide after slide of Russian ships steaming towards Cuba with their decks jammed with military vehicles and equipment. Captain Turner F. Caldwell, the acting-director of the Strategic Plans Division, reported that the CNO's staff "became overtly suspicious of Russian intentions in about the middle of July. . . . The presence of construction equipment as deck cargo indicated large-scale construction to be contemplated. This meant that a rather sudden decision to undertake a large-scale operation had been made in Russia, as otherwise time would have been taken to dismantle the equipment for shipment." Caldwell believed that the construction was the prelude to the stationing of ballistic missiles in Cuba. In short, the movements of the

large-hatch vessels did not go unnoted within the Navy's high command, who considered this to be highly suspicious. "Practically all the big-hatch ships that the Soviet Union had were put in this trade to Cuba," observed Vice Admiral Charles D. Griffin, the DCNO for Fleet Operations and Readiness. The large-hatches, needed "to get the missiles down in the hold, . . . invited our attention to something of a strategic nature." These concerns were heightened when overseas sources, possibly dockworker informants or naval attaches, reported "suspicious cargoes aboard Cuba-bound ships, obtained . . . at ports of loading and unloading." Indeed, in late July, Captain Caldwell, on his own initiative and with Admiral Anderson's knowledge, established a "Cuba Watch" committee to monitor the buildup and keep the CNO abreast of the latest Cuban developments. Caldwell's ad hoc group thereafter sifted through the intelligence reports, studied contingency plans, and periodically presented their estimates to the CNO and recommended that he prepare for an anticipated confrontation in the Caribbean. Contrary to Hilsman's and Garthoff's later claims, Soviet shipping movements did cause alarm that summer, at least within the Navy, but it also seems clear that Caldwell's work was not informed by the top secret, code name intelligence possessed by the president early that month.[13]

Waiting to get a close look at the Soviet forces was a

vastly improved American intelligence system. In response to Lansdale's call for better intelligence capabilities with respect to Cuba, an array of monitoring platforms and intelligence sources were in place and operating even before the first Soviet shipments entered Cuban waters in early August. Information about Cuba came from a number of sources, including reconnaissance overflights, signal intelligence collecting missions, infiltration of CIA trained agents and sub-agents in place, and other special operations. This massive surveillance effort aimed at, among other things, constructing an order of battle for Castro's air, ground, and sea forces. Gathering intelligence on the makeup of Cuban forces was a myriad of reconnaissance platforms. Six to ten times in July alone, Navy and Air Force F3D-2Q Skynight, AD-5Q Skyraider, WV-2Q Constellation, and A3D-2P Skywarrior electronic warfare aircraft flew around the island, skirting Cuban airspace, and monitored and intercepted communications and electronic emissions for analysis and classification. One of the surveillance operations, dubbed Quick Fox, tuned into the electromagnetic spectrum over Cuba, monitoring Russian and Cuban military message traffic across the island. In response to an urgent request from Major General Richard P. Klocko, the commander of the Air Force's Security Service which was responsible for signal intelligence, a specially configured C-130 Airborne Communications Reconnaissance

Platform redeployed from Central Europe to Florida to be used for Quick Fox. With Russian and Spanish language specialists added to the normal aircrew, the plane eavesdropped on communications whose volume increased owing to the flurry of military activity on the island. This aircraft proved so valuable that a second, advanced prototype C-130 arrived in Florida on 1 August to continue Quick Fox listening operations. In addition to this sophisticated assortment of aircraft, Lansdale reported in late July that eleven teams of trained CIA agents had been infiltrated into Cuba. One team, stationed in the Pinar del Rio Province in the western end of Cuba, grew to over 250 men, and they provided Washington with a closeup look at the arriving Soviet forces. Both the human intelligence sources and the massive electronic surveillance allowed little to escape American attention. On 23 July, Army Brigadier General Benjamin Harris, the JCS representative for Mongoose, told Lansdale, that while "gaps still exist," the "flow of information concerning Cuba has been greatly improved as a result these efforts." Two days later, Lansdale reported to the Special Group about the improved American intelligence capabilities and he rated them "superior."[14]

Another source of intelligence about the buildup deserves particular attention. Specially configured Navy surface ships were among the platforms maintaining a vigil

on Soviet and Cuban communications. Off Mariel, near Havana, a converted Liberty ship, her masts studded with top secret electronic eavesdropping equipment, steamed slowly up and down the coast in international waters, her sophisticated ears tuned into the airwaves around the Cuban capital. Launched in July 1945 as the 11,000-ton Liberty ship Samuel R. Aitken, the Oxford was activated from the National Defense Reserve Fleet in 1960 and converted to carry sophisticated electronic antennae and other emissions detection equipment. The first specialized signals intelligence ship built for the National Security Agency, the 441-foot Oxford was commissioned in July 1961 and deployed for duty nominally as part of the Atlantic Fleet Service Force. While designated a part of Service Squadron Eight, Oxford's movements were dictated by the NSA and the JCS, and her operational orders were issued from NSA and the JCS through CINCLANT and SERVLANT. The ship transmitted her collections directly to the NSA, however. Early on the morning of 16 July 1962, while Raul Castro was still in Moscow negotiating the status-of-forces agreement with the Kremlin, the Oxford stood out of her heavily guarded berth at the Norfolk Naval Base for a routine four-month intelligence collection patrol off South America. Even before the ship got underway, rumors were circulating among the crew that a change in her deployment was imminent, news that disappointed many of the sailors who

had looked forward to scheduled port calls in Buenos Aires, Rio, Recife, and Montevideo.[15]

The same intelligence that alerted Kennedy to the nature, and probably the contents of the Raul-Malinovsky negotiations prompted the NSA to ask the JCS to divert the Oxford from her original assignment and order her to a limited operational area off the coast of Havana. Thus began more than half a year of intensive surveillance operations. She was in position off Havana on 23 July and immediately began conducting operations on a 24 hour "wartime" basis. "Throughout the six-month period we were on station," reported one of her officers, "I seldom had a full night's sleep. Nothing waited for the next day to be acted upon. Collection assignments as well as reporting assignments were taken care of as soon as possible." Steaming in an endless racetrack course at speeds rarely exceeding 7 knots, "the Oxford would be the only Navy ship to run aground on it's own garbage," joked one crewmember, "and even Key West looked good when we entered port about once a month."[16]

The Cubans soon learned of the Oxford's presence and her function. She was often harassed by Castro's small navy, so a special communications link was established with Homestead Air Force Base and Boca Chica Naval Air Station on Key West, and there Air Force and Navy fighters stood ready to provide her with immediate support. On 31 August,

her bridge watch ordered the crew to battle stations when four Cuban torpedo boats began a high-speed run towards the spy ship. When the boats turned to generate a smoke screen, the Oxford's commanding officer called for the alert fighters. As it turned out, however, these threatening moves were meant only to harass the ship, while the real purpose was to snap propaganda photographs of the Oxford. Commander Thomas Cosgrove, the Oxford's captain, had prepared his ship for trouble. If the Cubans tried to stop and board her, he could call upon the ready aircraft from Florida and his own "repel boarders" team which was armed with automatic weapons and shotguns. The emergency destruction plan provided for the jettisoning of perforated, weighted bags stuffed with classified encryption codes and the burning of sensitive material in the ship's boiler. The harassment, reported one Chief Cryptologic Technician, added to the sense of urgency felt throughout the ship, for "indications were that this was more than a run by and that the 'game was afoot,' as Sherlock Holmes might say."[17]

With her array of antennae and other emissions-detection gear, the Oxford monitored, intercepted, and decrypted Cuban and Soviet communications in and around Havana and tracked Soviet vessels steaming into Cuban ports. Although normally operating twelve miles from the coast, she would often move closer in shore "if there was a

sighting of interest," according to one of her officers. Each week, the Oxford diverted from her normal track and headed for Key West. Met outside the harbor by a motor launch, she delivered the collected intercepts to a courier for delivery to the NSA at Fort Meade where they were subjected to an in-depth analysis. Items of a more timely nature were sent directly via electronic teletype. Before Castro's revolution and his decision to nationalize all Cuban industry, the American communications company ITT had operated Cuba's radio and telephone exchange system. "ITT had operated much of the Cuban communications system before Castro's nationalizations, and the company worked closely with the CIA and NSA to intercept messages," wrote a former intelligence analyst. Soon after Castro brought Cuba into Moscow's orbit, the company provided NSA with the technical layouts and specifics of the network, much of which was still in use by the Cubans. As a result, the Oxford's collection efforts produced a bounty of valuable intelligence.[18]

The timing of the Oxford's diversion and the duration of her deployment proved that she was of immense value to the NSA and to Kennedy, who knew that the ship was positioned off Havana and what her mission was. "The White House was aware of and approved our assignment to the areas and was apprised of our movements," recalled one of her officers. Although the decrypted intercepts provided by

the Oxford are still classified, the intelligence she gathered, remarked Secretary McNamara, was "valuable information, on the basis of which national policy was formulated." In all likelihood, Oxford intercepted communications which confirmed the closely-held intelligence on the Raul-Malinovsky talks, and in turn led to the photographic evidence of Soviet medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missile bases in Cuba. Intercepts of Soviet military communications on the island, arriving shipping traffic, or diplomatic message traffic from Havana were among the targets for her antennae. Vice Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, a member of the CNO's staff before assuming command of the U.S. Seventh Fleet in September, confirmed that "electronic intelligence acquired by surface ships led to the photographic intelligence which gave us undisputable evidence of the . . . Soviet missiles in Cuba." Hence, beginning in late July, Kennedy received invaluable communications and electronic intelligence concerning the magnitude and makeup of Soviet arms shipments to Cuba, information that likely gave additional warning of the Soviet ballistic missile deployment.[19]

The first Soviet vessels burdened with surface-to-air missiles and ballistic missile site construction gear arrived in Cuba in early August. At the debarkation ports of Mariel and Bahia Honda, small coastal towns west of Havana and only a few miles from the Oxford's station,

special Cuban security troops shut down all outside access to the docks. Civilians were evicted from their houses on the waterfront and a concrete wall complete with guard towers was erected around the port facility. Under the cover of darkness, Soviet personnel unloaded the mysterious cargos and moved the material in truck convoys to the surveyed SAM, MRBM, and IRBM sites at San Cristobal and Guanajay.[20]

Surveying the events in these ports and the movements of the trucks was the job of the eleven CIA teams sent into Cuba to implement Operation Mongoose. There is some evidence that low-level CIA analysts deduced what was afoot in late June or July, but it was not until shortly after the initial shipments of Soviet military hardware arrived in early August that the first reports of mysterious Soviet troop and equipment convoys in the Santiago de las Vegas area, just south of Havana, filtered into CIA headquarters. Numerous refugee reports of unusual construction activity, usually regarded as unreliable and fantastic, were also received by CIA analysts. The number and consistency of these reports, however, prompted the CIA to acknowledge in a mid-August intelligence summary that "clearly something new and different" was taking place in Cuba.[21]

The obvious magnitude of the Cuban buildup ignited the concerns of analysts not privy to the special code name intelligence about Raul's Moscow trip. The reports of

massive construction activity and the unprecedented volume of war material making its way to Cuba provoked a "drumbeat of concern," recalled John Hughes. He remembered that the prevailing opinion among senior DIA and CIA analysts at the time was that Khrushchev would not dare to deploy nuclear ballistic missiles outside the Soviet Union. This assessment was challenged by a growing number of junior analysts, who now started to question that conclusion owing to the sheer magnitude of the Soviet arms shipments. The benign interpretation begged the question: "What are they trying to support?" said Hughes. The logical answer was that the Soviets planned to station ballistic missiles on the island and he reached this conclusion by late August. Hughes was not alone in his analysis.[22]

Chapter Three

The upper reaches of the Kennedy administration were not wholly complacent. The highest-ranking administration official to attack the majority opinion was CIA Director John McCone. A conservative Republican from California and a veteran of the Eisenhower administration, he had replaced the venerable Allen Dulles as director in November. McCone was obviously privy to most of the intelligence on the Soviet Union, although he may not have received the special code name product which Commander McCabe's diary shows alerted Kennedy to Khrushchev's plot in early July. Assuming that McCone was not apprised of this explains in part his behavior that month, and in August and September, and suggests that Kennedy's secret was the product of a NSA communications intelligence operation. On the other hand, if McCone did know of the early July intelligence, his subsequent investigation of the buildup appears unnecessarily ill-informed. In either case, he was the only member of the NSC to question the purpose of the buildup in Cuba with any sustained rigor. McCone knew about the Raul Castro-Malinovsky meetings, but in all likelihood he did not know the specifics of the status-of-forces agreement, the timetable of the buildup, or what Khrushchev's objectives were.[1]

Low-ranking CIA analysts concluded in late June or early July that the Soviet buildup in Cuba was not entirely

defensive in character, and sometime in July McCone began to share their convictions. Although Robert Kennedy claimed that McCone "never communicated [his concerns] to anybody," in fact, the CIA director, beginning with a memorandum on 10 August, urged JFK to take action to thwart the buildup before the ballistic missiles arrived and were made operational. In subsequent White House meetings on 17 and 22 August, attended by the president, Robert Kennedy, Rusk, McNamara, and Bundy, McCone outlined his strong suspicions. He told the group that he believed that the Soviets were erecting ballistic missile launch sites in Cuba. The president's reaction to this is not recorded, but it surely confirmed what he had been led to believe in early July. Unlike other Soviet satellites, McCone said, "Cuba was the only piece of real estate that they had indirect control of where a missile could reach Washington or New York and not reach Moscow." The surface-to-air missiles now arriving served little purpose in defending Cuba against an invasion inasmuch as they "could be momentarily destroyed by low-flying airplanes" using air-to-ground rockets. The real purpose of the SAMs, he reckoned, was to force the United States to abandon the overhead reconnaissance flights. "Then we wouldn't know what went on in the interior of Cuba" and the construction of the ballistic missile bases might continue without notice. Rusk and McNamara disagreed. To date, there was

no evidence of ballistic missiles in Cuba, they argued, so any action taken now would be premature. Only when the United States possessed photographic evidence of ballistic missiles, evidence that convinced the allies of the Soviet scheme, might the president act. But how to act was the question that now needed an answer.[1]

McCone was not the only one concerned about the object of the Soviet buildup. At the Pentagon, two flag officers, both members of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, wary of Soviet intentions and convinced that the arms buildup was the prelude to the introduction of ballistic missiles, voiced their concerns to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Established soon after Pearl Harbor and American entry into World War II, the JSSC consisted of one two-star flag officer from each service and was charged with providing the JCS with an independent assessment of future strategic problems. By the late 1950s, the committee had lost its original function, which was now performed by the Joint Staff and the respective service staffs. Thus, left largely to their own devices, the members of the JSSC, who still enjoyed direct access to the Joint Chiefs, conjured up their own projects. In late July, a recently-arrived member descended into the Navy's photointerpretation area in the Pentagon. There, reviewing the latest shots of Cuba-bound Soviet merchantmen, this admiral and his counterpart, an Air Force major general, first began to

suspect that the Soviets had more in mind for Cuba than installing a SAM system.[2]

In mid-August, after thoroughly reviewing the available intelligence and drafting a convincing argument, they presented their case to the JCS. Aware that American Thor and Jupiter medium-range ballistic missiles stationed in Britain, Italy, and Turkey presented the Soviets with several vexing strategic considerations, they tried to convince the chiefs that the Soviets were basing ballistic missiles in Cuba in order to pose these same targeting difficulties for the United States. Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay was keenly aware of the dilemma for America's early warning system that Cuba-based ballistic missiles would create. Upon hearing the JSSC brief, LeMay "sat up straight, turned up his hearing aid, and joined our side," recalled the admiral. The service chiefs all agreed with the JSSC assessment, but the new JCS chairman, General Taylor, did not, and he was unwilling to sound the alarm without further evidence and refused to convey their argument to McNamara or the president. "Taylor panicked and wouldn't tell anyone," according to the admiral. The two officers had prepared a letter complete with options for dealing with the deployment, but Taylor refused to take it up to the White House. "He didn't think the case was strong enough to take to the president." Thus, another chance to move quickly was

lost.[3]

McCone's argument at the NSC meeting on the 22nd, however, compelled Kennedy to explore ways to deal with the Soviet deployment, if and when the ballistic missiles were confirmed. The following day, in National Security Action Memorandum No. 181, he ordered that "actions and studies be undertaken in light of evidence of new bloc activity in Cuba." This directive, the first evidence that Kennedy intended to respond to the Soviet scheme, catalysed several political and military preparations and demonstrated that, even now, he sought a way out of his dilemma. Addressing the possibility that Khrushchev might try to trade the withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles in Turkey for the withdrawal of the Russian MRBMs in Cuba, Kennedy instructed the Pentagon for the first time to explore how the American missiles might be removed. The Pentagon was also told to study ways to destroy "any installations in Cuba capable of launching a nuclear attack on the U.S." In addition, hopeful that a stern warning might move the Kremlin to reconsider its plans, Kennedy asked the State and Defense Departments to study "the advantages and disadvantages of making a statement that the U.S. would not tolerate the establishment of military forces. . . which might launch a nuclear attack from Cuba against the U.S." And he ordered "the line of activity projected for Operation Mongoose Plan B-plus be developed with all possible speed." Lansdale's

Plan B, drafted in late July, called for exerting "all possible diplomatic, economic, psychological, and other pressures to overthrow the Castro-Communist regime without overt employment of U.S. military." It is unclear what Kennedy thought Plan B might accomplish at this stage of the Soviet buildup in Cuba. It is possible that Kennedy, aware of the forthcoming ballistic missile deployment, simply hoped to stir up trouble on the island for both the Cubans and Russians, perhaps thinking that the pressure might lead Khrushchev to cancel the missile deployment. As a final note, Bundy called for a meeting of the Special Group on 1 September to discuss progress and stressed the "sensitive character of these intructions."[4]

While the president was energizing the State and Defense Departments and the CIA, his brother, Robert Kennedy, explored the legal issues involved in obstructing the establishment of ballistic missile bases in Cuba. The attorney general, one of the few who knew about the Raul-Malinovsky treaty, was the president's closest adviser and confidante, and a driving force behind the administration's efforts to oust Castro. Sometime in mid-August, possibly after meeting with McCone on the 17th or 22nd, he instructed lawyers in the Justice Department to conduct "a serious study of whether the United States could as a matter of international law, take action to *prevent* long-range missiles from being installed in Cuba, and perhaps of

what form that action might take." The resulting paper, essentially a discussion of the right of self-defense, was written by recently-appointed Assistant Attorney General Norbert Schlei. It advocated a naval "visit-and-search" blockade of Cuba aimed at thwarting a Soviet deployment of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. Schlei "emphasized that it would be of extreme importance to try to involve the OAS in whatever action was required." This study formed the foundation for legal arguments defined and refined as the crisis grew into October.[5]

State Department officials, not privy to the July code name intelligence, still treated the Cuban buildup as a problem involving only conventional arms. On 24 August, during the first background briefing of the press on the Soviet shipments, Roger Hilsman told reporters about the increasing flow of Warsaw Pact arms to Cuba. Unaware of the intelligence closely guarded by Kennedy, he confirmed reports of construction activity progressing at various locations on the island and the presence of supporting Soviet technicians, and speculated that much of the equipment arriving was destined to "go into the improvement of coastal and air defenses." Although State expressed official alarm, Rusk insisted in public and private that the buildup was essentially benign. He clung to this wrongheaded view until the last minute despite the growing burden of evidence to the contrary.[6]

Ongoing U-2 surveillance of Cuba obtained the first photographic evidence of the new coastal and air defenses on 29 August -- and, possibly, much more. A high-altitude U-2, flying a track along the length of the island, took photographs which soon after fixed the location of seven SA-2 Guideline surface-to-air missile sites in Western Cuba. Capable of intercepting aircraft up to a ceiling of 80,000 feet, yet ineffective below a floor of 1,200 feet, the Guidelines were photographed at Bahia Honda, Havana, La Coloma, Mariel, Matanzas, San Julian, and Cienfuegos. Photography of the Guanajay area, twenty miles southwest of Havana, revealed the initial phases of construction of an intermediate-range ballistic missile site, although at the time the purpose of this site could not be determined positively. The JCS chronology of the crisis confirmed that "in 29 August photography, only the initial construction of one of the MR/IRBM sites had appeared." The NIC Summary noted that "vehicles and building materials later determined to be connected with construction support areas" for the IRBM base at Guanajay were photographed, but Hilsman described the markings as "unidentifiable scratchings of earth." Nonetheless, these 29 August photographs occasioned a renewed debate among DIA analysts. "There was much speculation on the purpose of the construction activities," remarked Vice Admiral Vernon L. Lowrance, the Director of Naval Intelligence, and DIA

analyst John Hughes recalled that the "concern [now] began to grow that there was much more to the buildup than the U-2 had seen."[7]

Kennedy now moved to restrict the dissemination of intelligence within his administration about Cuba. On 31 August, he ordered that the information about the SAM sites and anti-ship cruise missile sites not be distributed throughout the intelligence community until he could determine what course of action to take. This move marked the beginning of a slow tightening on intelligence concerning the Cuban buildup. Already, both the code name intelligence from the Raul-Malinovsky negotiations and the Oxford's intercepts, or at least those hinting of ballistic missiles, were known only to a select few, or possibly only to Kennedy himself. He might have issued orders to NSA that he was to be the only recipient of this communications intelligence. By withholding the information on Khrushchev's plan for as long as possible, he may have hoped to gain more time to devise an adequate response, or perhaps to convince the Soviet premier not to implement his plan, and by doing so avoid the enormous political pressure that he knew would surely erupt once news of the ballistic missiles reached Republican hands.[8]

The Republicans, however, had already seized on Cuba, and some of them seemed intent upon using Kennedy's handling of the buildup as the pivotal issue in the

upcoming November 1962 congressional elections. Castro had come to power during Eisenhower's presidency, however, and Kennedy had taken a stiffer line on Cuba than his predecessor, so the Republicans were in an awkward position. Nevertheless, led by Senators Kenneth Keating of New York and Homer Capehart of Indiana, the GOP pounced on Kennedy for standing idly by while Cuba was transformed into a bastion of Soviet military power. The same day that the president moved to restrict intelligence on Cuba, Keating, who had not theretofore been a vocal critic of the administration, opened up his relentless offensive on Kennedy's inaction. In the first in a series of speeches delivered on the Senate floor, he declared that 1,200 Soviet troops, not technicians as Kennedy was insisting, had disembarked at the Cuban port of Mariel. Furthermore, mysterious military convoys and "flatbed trucks. . . transporting concave metal structures" had been spotted rolling through the countryside. Accusing Kennedy of minimizing the seriousness of the buildup and of not disclosing the extent of Warsaw Pact arms shipments to Cuba, Keating speculated that the Soviets might be constructing missile bases or sensitive listening posts to eavesdrop on American space launches at Cape Canaveral. Kennedy was following a "look-the-other-way policy" characterized by a "wishful underestimation of the dangers that are involved," and Keating implored him to present the

matter to the OAS and "urge upon them the necessity for prompt and vigorous action." As the Soviet shipments increased in frequency, the Republicans intensified their campaign to make Cuba the major issue at the November polls.[9]

Keating did not divulge the identity of his mysterious informants, and the sources of his information remain a mystery to this day. "All my information about the Soviet buildup in Cuba was either furnished or confirmed by Government sources," he later wrote. "Once I began to speak out, additional facts on Cuba poured into my office." There are several theories about Keating's sources. After being officially rebuffed by the Navy when he asked for information about Rear Admiral O'Donnell's intelligence report in late 1961, Keating might have been approached by someone within the Navy Department who thereafter fed him with information about the Soviet arms shipments. DIA analyst Hughes believed that Keating acquired his information from his contacts in Cuba and from some of the refugees who were still streaming into Florida. "I believe he had sources in Mariel feeding him information." Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze thought differently, and speculated that an intelligence analyst in the DIA or CIA was Keating's source. In Nitze's view, this concerned junior analyst, unable to convince his superiors that the Soviets were deploying ballistic missiles, passed

on his findings to Keating in the hope that he could force Kennedy into action. "Keating probably got his intelligence from a disgruntled analyst," Nitze concluded. Others, however, believed that Keating twisted the intelligence reports already available to him as a senator, weaving them together for his own purposes. This seems unlikely owing to Keating's earlier dealings with the Kennedy administration. Keating was a liberal New York Republican who supported a large fraction of Kennedy's New Frontier domestic programs. The Cuban affair transformed Keating into a bitter, relentless critic. Nevertheless, Senator Bourke Hikenlooper, a long-time Republican critic of the administration, felt that he "had the same information that Ken Keating had, but basically it came from Cuban refugees, and I couldn't depend upon its reliability or separate fact from wishful thinking." Yet, in Keating's later speeches, his information was uncannily accurate and suggested that he had access to more than mere refugee reports.[10]

The growing wave of political pressure did not go unnoticed in the White House. Uncertain as to what action to take and now under fire from the Hill, Kennedy met with Rusk, McNamara, and his brother in the Oval Office on the morning of 4 September. In the hope that a sharp warning might deter the Soviets from deploying ballistic missiles to Cuba, but unwilling to go public with the evidence

available to date, Kennedy directed his brother to protest the buildup to Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. Dobrynin visited the Justice Department that afternoon and told Robert Kennedy that he "could assure the President that this military buildup was not of any significance and that Khrushchev would do nothing to disrupt the relationship of our two countries during the period prior to the election." The attorney general, doubting that Dobrynin was telling the truth, replied that "it would be of the gravest consequences if the Soviet Union placed missiles in Cuba."[11]

Robert Kennedy reported to his brother later that day, expressed his skepticism about Dobrynin's assurances, and recommended that a public warning to the Soviets be issued. Working with Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, McGeorge Bundy, and Norbert Schlei, he strengthened a draft prepared earlier by Secretary Rusk. At the attorney general's insistence, this statement explicitly cautioned the Soviets not to deploy *offensive* missiles in Cuba. Robert Kennedy believed that it would be "much more difficult for them to take steps like that after you have made that statement." This statement, in its final form, addressed the need to warn Khrushchev not to go any further than deploying SAMs and the need to respond to Congressional allegations that a Soviet offensive capability already existed in Cuba. Released later that afternoon, it

confirmed the presence of SAM sites in Cuba, but declared that the administration possessed no evidence of "any organized combat force in Cuba" or "of the presence of offensive ground-to-ground missiles. . . . Were it to be otherwise," the statement ended, "the gravest issues would arise."[12]

It appears, however, that Kennedy may have sent a private, personal written warning to Khrushchev -- in addition to this public statement. "Dean Rusk gave the president a draft letter to be sent to Khrushchev," recalled Commander McCabe. "So far as I know, the letter was sent." This letter, "in essence, warning the Kremlin about what they were doing," was probably handed to Dobrynin by the attorney general when they met on the afternoon of the 4th. This means of communicating with Khrushchev was intended, of course, to bypass the State Department. The letter is not at the Kennedy Library, but there is evidence that those papers are incomplete, and Pierre Salinger, Kennedy's press secretary, recently admitted that "Kennedy and Khrushchev exchanged forty-five letters [on nuclear weapons issues] to try to improve US-Soviet relations." These letters are still classified.[13]

The following day, acting on Schlei's recommendation that the OAS be asked to support American action against Cuba and the arms buildup, Rusk met with thirteen OAS ambassadors and discussed the latest developments. He

reiterated Kennedy's statement and warned that Washington intended to use "whatever means may be necessary" to prevent communist expansion into the hemisphere. This was not the issue at hand, although it was an early articulation of the policy termed the Johnson Doctrine after LBJ's 1965 armed intervention in the Dominican Republic's civil war. As to the Soviet arms buildup, he continued, the United States had no evidence at that moment that there were offensive surface-to-surface missiles in Cuba. The meeting ended with Rusk's call for a closed session at the end of the month to review further developments.[14]

The proof that something untoward was afoot in Cuba was piling up. By this time, overhead photographic surveillance had begun to uncover the extent of Cuba's rapidly improving air defenses. On the afternoon of 5 September, a U-2 photographed five additional SA-2 missile batteries being constructed in western and central Cuba, thereby raising the total number of confirmed SAM sites to twelve. Cloud cover over the eastern end of the island prevented complete coverage, however, but analysts did note a peculiar installation near the town of Banes on Cuba's northeast coast. It was tentatively identified as a surface-to-surface missile base and the area was put on the target list for the next U-2 sortie. Additional frames provided the first evidence that the Soviets had shipped

MiG-21 Fishbeds to Cuba, the most advanced attack fighters in the Soviet inventory, and they also revealed the appearance in Cuban waters of more KOMAR-class patrol boats. Each KOMAR was armed with two anti-ship cruise missiles, capable of hitting targets at a range of 12 miles, weapons that might pose a significant hazard to an invading fleet. Photographs of the previously-surveyed ballistic missile sites at San Cristobal, Remedios, and Sagua la Grande still reportedly revealed no construction, while the purpose of the activity at Guanajay continued to puzzle analysts.[15]

The growing strength of Cuba's air defenses led to increased speculation among analysts as to the ultimate goal of the Soviet buildup. At the DIA, Air Force Colonel John Wright, while examining the 5 September U-2 photographs, noted that the placement of the SAM batteries in Western Cuba was peculiar. The concentration of SAMs west of Havana, he recalled, "was most curious." Six sites in particular were positioned in areas so remote that the missiles provided no protection to existing military targets. "There was something special about the placement of the SAMs," according to Hughes. It was at this juncture that "John Wright developed a theory that priority was being given to a certain geographic region, which would herald the arrival of an offensive weapon system." Wright's theory, shaped within a week after the 5 September

U-2 mission, met with stubborn skepticism from his DIA superiors, who, lacking convincing evidence to the contrary, still clung to the belief that the Soviets would not risk placing offensive missiles in Cuba. Wright nonetheless pressed his case with DIA Director General Joseph Carroll and recommended that the area west of Havana be given priority for the upcoming U-2 missions. If offensive missiles were being shipped to Cuba, he believed, that was where they would appear.[16]

The public debate over Cuba intensified. Not satisfied with Kennedy's 4 September press statement, Keating attacked the adminstration's distinction between offensive and defensive weapons in another Senate speech two days later. "Whether a gun is offensive or defensive," he proclaimed, "depends entirely on the man who holds the gun." Other senators, notably Democrats George Smathers of Florida and Strom Thurmond from South Carolina, urged Kennedy to invade Cuba and so rid the hemisphere of the communist spearhead, and on 7 September, Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen, the Senate minority leader, and Indiana Congressman Charles Halleck, the House minority leader, proposed enacting a joint resolution to give Kennedy the power to act against Cuba, in the hope that it might move him to do something. Later that same day, Kennedy asked Congress for the authority to call up 150,000 members of the Ready Reserve "to permit prompt and effective

responses. . . to challenges. . . in any part of the free world." The administration tried to link this legislation to concurrent tensions over Berlin, but most observers viewed it as a move to counter the increasing criticism of Kennedy's policy on Cuba. The underlying sense that a national crisis was impending meant that Congress was willing to strengthen Kennedy's hand. "Certainly we should give the President this authority if he feels it will be helpful," said Senator Leverett Saltonstall, the ranking Republican on the Armed Services Committee.[17]

On one front the administration tried to quiet the uproar on the Hill, while on another it moved to improve its intelligence about events in Cuba. On 10 September, the Special Group, with the addition of Secretary Rusk, met in Bundy's White House office with the Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance (COMOR) to examine the list of upcoming reconnaissance flights. It was under President Eisenhower that the Special Group had been first assembled to review direct penetration U-2 missions, after a number of inadvertent U-2 overflights highlighted the need for a central reviewing authority. The targeting list and mission schedule was drawn up by COMOR, a board of intelligence representatives responsible for coordinating the flow of targeting requirements to the available collection systems, including U-2s. COMOR transmitted its list to the Special Group, which considered the political

complications attending each mission. "Their job was a matter of judgment as to whether or not the value of the intelligence was worth the risk," recalled Air Force Colonel Ralph Steakley, the director of the Joint Reconnaissance Center which coordinated most of the military's intelligence missions. The appearance of the first SA-2 batteries in the 29 August photos led the Special Group to fear that one of the Soviet SAMs would shoot down a high-altitude U-2 and that this would result in the very political incident which Kennedy so desperately wanted to avoid. The resulting uproar might force a reduction or even the cancellation of further direct overflights. These fears were magnified by the shootdown of a Taiwan-based CIA U-2 over mainland China the preceding day. Now, with an increased number of U-2 flights scheduled for the next few weeks, the group sought to minimize the risk of losing another spy plane to a Russian missile. "We had to be cautious about approving U-2 overflights given the potential presented by these anti-aircraft sites for shooting them down," recalled diplomat U. Alexis Johnson, who represented the State Department on the Special Group.[18]

The Special Group did not as yet understand the importance of covering western Cuba and did not attach any overriding priority to that end of the island. Their main concern seemed to be limiting the time during which a U-2

was within the range of an SA-2's lethal destruction cone. For the Guideline, this distance was a slant range of twenty-five miles. Rusk reportedly proposed that missions flown up one side of the island and back down the other side be cancelled in order to minimize this exposure. "The Secretary of State suggested . . .that rather than a single flight that would keep the U-2 over Cuba for a long period of time, there should be several flights that 'dipped into' Cuban air space," recalled Hilsman. Rusk also proposed an increase in the number of photography missions flying outside of Cuba's three-mile territorial limit, as this might also distract the Cubans from those direct overflights that were flown. "Everyone present thought the idea was an excellent solution to the problem," Hilsman later wrote. Throughout the crisis, Rusk acted with doggedly predictable restraint which, while valuable in negotiations or bureaucratic disputes, was ill-suited to events that demanded a more imaginative, risk-taking temperament. Controversy attends the import and effect of his proposal. "I think that's hogwash," said Colonel Steakley. "They probably told them [COMOR] to try and avoid the SAMs, but not alter the flight path." All U-2 sorties, he continued, "were planned to maximize target coverage and minimize the danger to the aircraft, some 'dipped in' and some didn't."[19]

Although it was possible that the Special Group

ordered a halt to the end-to-end flights, no evidence suggests that they suspended direct overflights over Western Cuba. Hilsman reported that analysts were particularly concerned at this time with the installation photographed at Banes that was tentatively identified as a surface-to-surface missile site. Thus, it is likely that the mission schedule gave priority to the eastern end of the island. The concern about the SAMs was premature, however. The electronic surveillance aircraft orbiting Cuba had not yet detected a Guideline fire control radar which would have indicated that the SAMs in the Pinar del Rio and La Habana provinces were operational. The first such signal was not detected for over a week. While the construction and SAM sites to the west of Havana surely evoked concern, COMOR was probably satisfied that adequate coverage could be maintained for the time being by the peripheral photography missions. Strangely, available records provide no indication of any peripheral sorties flown around the western end during the remainder of September or early October. Flying at a normal operational altitude of 70,000 feet, the U-2's powerful cameras could have easily photographed construction activity at the Guanajay IRBM site, which was situated only ten miles inland. Indeed, a peripheral mission, flown around the eastern end of Cuba in early October, revealed two SA-2 sites at Chambas and Esmeralda. Both sites were located

more than twenty miles inland from the three-mile territorial limit. As it was, for the last three weeks of September, the Special Group approved four direct penetration flights over Central and Eastern Cuba.[20]

The Soviets, meanwhile, continued their program of cover and deception. Kennedy's 4 September letter to Khrushchev was delayed in reaching the Kremlin owing to communications difficulties between the Soviet embassy in Washington and Moscow. According to Dobrynin, for reasons he did not disclose, the Soviet embassy did not have either a direct telephone line or radio communications with Moscow before and during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Correspondence and routine message traffic were sometimes encoded and sent via Western Union telegram, but sensitive material was hand-delivered by diplomatic courier. Kennedy was surely alerted to this unusual arrangement by the NSA and of the delay which accompanied communicating with Khrushchev through Dobrynin. Kennedy's 4 September message was likely delivered to Moscow by a diplomatic courier. Because of the relatively long delay inherent in this method, Khrushchev's response came via the Soviet news agency Tass a full week later, more than likely following a high-level debate over how to respond to Kennedy's warning. Tass's statement declared that there "was no need for the Soviet Union to set up in any other country -- Cuba for instance -- the weapons it has for repelling aggression, for a

retaliatory blow." Buried amidst the usual communist bombast was a crisply phrased warning that an attack against Cuba "will be the start of the unleashing of war." This was a major change in Moscow's policy. Analysis of the 11 September statement by State Department specialists soon thereafter interpreted it as representing an important Soviet policy shift, but understood it only as a means of preventing direct American military action against Castro's regime.[21]

In the White House, Kennedy, under siege from Congress, struggled to find a solution to the whole problem of Castro and the ballistic missiles. On the Hill, a chorus of congressmen, both Republicans and Democrats, cried for an invasion or a blockade of Cuba to shut down the flow of sophisticated Soviet arms to Castro, and this increased the pressure on Kennedy to respond. "The Congressional head of steam on this is the most serious we have had," Bundy told the president. "The immediate hazard is that the Administration may appear weak and indecisive." Yet Kennedy was still fumbling for a way to deal with the problem -- although he had Schlei's blockade plan in hand. As an interim measure, he convened a press conference on the 13th both to stem the tide of Congressional fury and to warn Moscow once again. "If at any time the Communist buildup in Cuba," he proclaimed, "were to endanger or interfere with our security in any way. . . or become an

offensive military base of significant capacity. . . then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security." According to Major General Chester Clifton, the president's military aide, Kennedy and his circle now groped to find an effective response, and, at the same time, continued operations aimed at destroying Castro's regime. He knew that the lumber freighters had been assembled, that at least two of these vessels were en route to Cuba, and that the sites for the MRBMs were under construction. He probably hoped that his warnings of the 4th and the 13th would move Khrushchev to order the ships to turn around or to suspend the movement of the missiles from the ships to the launching sites. "We knew they were putting them in there," recalled Clifton, "but we did not know what we were going to do about Castro. We had identified the things and there were no [ballistic] missiles there yet, . . . and, of course, we watched it every day to see if there were Soviet troops there. . . and when would the missiles themselves be put in position."[22]

The debate among Kennedy's closest advisers produced few answers in early September. "There was a continuing flow of surveillance information," said Clifton, "and the problem was to get in our own minds the options of, when the missiles came, what were we going to do. Everybody had a different idea, everything from bombing Cuba to invading the place, to seeing what kind of swap we could make."

Before that decision was made, Kennedy acted vigorously to discount any evidence or suggestion of Soviet ballistic missiles in Cuba. "The Administration's response was to try to dampen this all down, and one strategy that was pursued was to argue that the reports of missiles in Cuba referred only to SAMs," recalled Chayes.[23]

The agents already in place in Cuba as a result of Lansdale's Mongoose scheme now came in handy. While Kennedy winced and dallied over what to do, the Special Group Augmented met again on 12 September and decided to use Lansdale's operatives to stir up more trouble for the communists. He was instructed to "cause actions by Cubans against Bloc personnel" on the island, creating as many difficulties for the Soviets as possible. As the month wore on, Kennedy personally pressed for further increases in the tempo of Mongoose operations as the only means at hand to create havoc on the island, even though these activities did little to disrupt Soviet activity.[24]

By mid-month it was evident that Kennedy's warnings had had little effect on Khrushchev, who forged ahead with the deployment in the absence of any stiff action by Kennedy to stop him. Khrushchev now suspected that Kennedy was aware of what the Soviets were up to and that he had as yet failed to react. "The Americans became frightened," he wrote, "and we stepped up our shipments." On the 15th, the large-hatch Soviet freighter Poltava docked at Mariel.

Soviet personnel offloaded her cargo of Sandal ballistic missiles and moved them in a well-guarded convoy down to the San Cristobal MRBM site on the night of 17-18 September. Four days earlier, patrol planes from Guantanamo shadowed another large-hatch freighter, the Omsk, as she stood into the southern port of Casilda, where she later unloaded ballistic missiles destined for the site at Sagua la Grande. "A very important element insofar as intelligence was concerned," recalled O'Donnell, "was that the ports into which the ships sailed . . . really helped to localize the probable sites of the missiles." On the 16th, Navy P-2V Neptunes photographed large, deck-loaded crates on the Soviet merchantman Kasimov. Photointerpreters, using a method of analysis dubbed "cratology," determined that these containers held the dismantled components of Il-28 Beagle aircraft, a nuclear-capable, light bomber with a combat radius of 740 nautical miles. On the 17th, a U-2 targeting the suspicious area near Banes confirmed earlier suspicions of an AS-1 Kennel shore-to-ship cruise missile site.[25]

Summing up what this all meant was one of the jobs of the United States Intelligence Board, a panel composed of delegates from each intelligence arm. On 19 September the board met to consider the latest developments in Cuba and produce a "community" estimate of the situation. It is clear now that the board's brief was incomplete, however.

Other than the closely-held intelligence from the Raul-Malinovsky talks and the Oxford's intercepts, the board did not possess several key pieces of available intelligence. The recent arrival of the Omsk and Poltava were noted, but, according to Roger Hilsman, the observations that they rode high on the water and were equipped with large-hatches were not thought to be significant and, therefore, not truly appreciated. The fact that these important clues were not married with earlier suspicions developed by McCone and the JSSC defies comprehension. In addition, a report from a CIA source in Cuba of an MRBM siting was not, owing to the time lag in getting his message to Washington, brought before the board. Thus, based on only the SA-2 and AS-1 photographs, the board concluded that while "the U.S.S.R. could derive considerable military advantage from the establishment of Soviet medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba," the members were convinced that the introduction of these weapons systems into Cuba "would be incompatible with Soviet policy as we presently estimate it."[26]

Perhaps one of the reasons for their startlingly erroneous conclusion was that CIA Director John McCone did not attend the meeting as he was vacationing in Europe on his honeymoon. He kept in constant contact with the agency, however, and received periodic intelligence updates on the buildup. From 7 to 19 September he sent a series of

telegrams to his acting deputy, Lieutenant General Marshall Carter, arguing that Soviet ballistic missiles were already in Cuba. McCone urged Carter to recommend that low-level reconnaissance missions be flown over the island to end all doubts, but Carter refused to incorporate McCone's views into the USIB estimate on the grounds that McCone, being absent from Washington, did not possess all of the necessary intelligence to draw such a conclusion. At any rate, both State and the DIA were still unconvinced and that stubborn attitude probably contributed to the outcome of the Intelligence Board's deliberations.[27]

The intense surveillance of Cuba, however, soon began to uncover all of the intelligence necessary to convince senior analysts that an offensive capability was being deployed. On 21 September, a report from a recently-arrived refugee reached CIA headquarters in Langley. It told of "a convoy of 20 long objects," recalled Colonel Wright, "measuring 65-70 feet in length, being transported on trailers." More importantly, the refugee had even sketched the rear section of the missile, and his drawing closely resembled that of the Soviet SS-4 Sandal ballistic missile. Wright noted that this report reinforced his theory that "the Soviets could be setting up strategic missiles in Cuba," specifically in the Pinar del Rio province, southwest of Havana. Armed with this new intelligence, he again presented his case to his superiors.

General Carroll, agreeing that Wright's theory was probably accurate, concurred with the colonel's assessment about Pinar del Rio and ordered that the region be placed on the targeting list for the next scheduled U-2 flight.[28]

Other quarters were also astir. The mounting evidence and lack of an American response prompted the admiral and his Air Force counterpart on the Joint Strategic Survey Committee to approach Taylor and the Joint Chiefs again in mid-September. Their argument was augmented with the latest intelligence about the Omsk and Poltava, and they carried the same letter to Kennedy listing several steps he might take in response to the presence of ballistic missiles. The two met with the chiefs again to warn them that Soviet ballistic missiles were being established in Cuba. "This time, Taylor listened more closely," recalled the admiral, "but he still didn't think we were right." For reasons that he did not explain, Taylor bypassed yet another opportunity to present the JSSC's conclusions to the president.[29]

In sum, by the end of September, a growing number of intelligence analysts and high-ranking officers in the Pentagon had concluded that the Soviets were placing ballistic missiles in Cuba, and they began to protest the inaction of Kennedy's administration. Kennedy's meager attempts to maneuver out of the predicament in early September had been the only visible administration

response, although a series of studies were initiated in late August to examine the dilemma. But a concerted effort to prove or disprove the theory that the Soviets were shipping ballistic missiles to Cuba never emerged, and the U-2 flights, prevented by the SAMs from flying over the most suspicious area, the western part of the island, continued at a lackluster pace into October. On 25 or 26 September, McCone returned from Europe and became even more alarmed upon learning that Cuba's western end had not been photographed since 5 September. "I found that during my absence. . . surveillance had come to a stop," he recalled, and "I insisted upon its resumption." McCone's return from abroad and the growing unrest in the intelligence community, the military, and on the Hill, set the stage for Kennedy's crisis of October.[30]

Chapter Four

The overwhelming evidence that the ballistic missiles had reached Cuba finally moved McNamara to meet with the JCS in the Pentagon on 1 October to discuss the latest intelligence and the status of the military's contingency plans for dealing with the problem. Colonel Wright presented the intelligence collected to date which suggested that ballistic missiles were in Cuba and explained his suspicion that the Pinar del Rio countryside might harbor an MRBM site. Although "explained as theory only," Wright told McNamara that "it was in the national interest to risk the loss of another U-2 in order to obtain this information." Anderson, long since convinced that the buildup would culminate in the deployment of ballistic missiles, recalled that Wright presented "photographic intelligence showing that the missiles were in Cuba." According to the CNO, "it was not particularly a surprise to me. . . we sort of expected it." Wright's convincing brief prompted the Joint Chiefs to make ready the forces designated in the contingency plans. Anderson immediately called Admiral Dennison at Norfolk and told him to prepare to launch the air strikes or to impose the naval blockade. In turn, Dennison ordered his respective subordinate commands to preposition supplies and ordnance so as to achieve "maximum readiness" to conduct the air strike by 20 October. Two days later, on 3 October, he issued

Operational Order 41-62, directing all commands within the Atlantic Fleet to prepare for a complete blockade of Cuba in support of the Cuban OPLANs.[1]

Although the extent and nature of the intelligence on Soviet ballistic missile bases in the hands of the wider American intelligence community on 1 October remains ambiguous, it was convincing enough to prompt the Joint Chiefs to prepare for military action against Cuba. Within the Navy, other high-ranking officers, in addition to Anderson, were convinced by this date that the intelligence, either in the form of photographs or communications intelligence, was available to act on the Cuban buildup. "We knew three weeks before it ever came out to the public in general what was going on down there, that there were missile sites," recalled Vice Admiral Herbert D. Riley, the director of the Joint Staff. "The military got the information and passed it on to the Chiefs and to the White House, and they sat on it for awhile hoping it would go away. . . . But we had beautiful pictures of these sites and the stuff going in." Rear Admiral Hayward, the commander of Carrier Division Two, noted that "the fact of the missiles was known a long time before from many sources." He felt that "we certainly could have gone on record to the Soviets at that time and we did not have to let it progress to the so called 'eye ball' confrontation that happened."[2]

Even some of Kennedy's inner circle suggested that photos from the late September U-2 flights provided important evidence of Soviet ballistic missile bases. The president's speechwriter, Theodore Sorenson, wrote that "late September photography of the San Cristobal area might have provided at least some hints of suspicious activity more than three weeks earlier." But, according to available intelligence summaries, no direct penetration U-2 missions were flown over San Cristobal after 5 September. Sorenson may have been referring to unavailable results of a peripheral photography mission. He claimed that the September photographs were not "sufficiently meaningful to convince the OAS, our allies and the world that actual missiles were being installed." However, both John Hughes, the DIA analyst, and Arthur Lundahl, the Director of the National Photographic Intelligence Center, agreed that the United States did not possess photographs of Soviet missile sites, in any phase of construction, until the 14 October U-2 mission. That information came from other sources. The IRBM site at Guanajay, which was in the early phases of construction when it was spotted on 29 August, evidently could not be positively identified as a ballistic missile site. Regardless of whether positive photographs existed at the end of September, many in Washington already knew that, contrary to the 19 September USIB estimate, the Soviets were stationing ballistic missiles in Cuba.[3]

The day following his 1 October meeting with the JCS, McNamara sent a memo to the chiefs to ensure that the military contingency plans were made ready, something the chiefs had begun to work on several weeks earlier. His memo outlined various contingencies "under which military action against Cuba may be necessary and toward which our military planning should be oriented," including evidence that the "Castro regime has permitted the positioning of bloc offensive weapons systems on Cuban soil or in Cuban harbors." He solicited their views on operational plans, preparatory moves, and the impact on other areas of operations should forces in the United States be dedicated to an invasion of Cuba. McNamara defined the objectives as the "removal of the threat to U.S. security," or the "removal of the Castro regime," and added that "inasmuch as the second objective is the more difficult objective and may be required if the first is to be permanently achieved, attention should be focused upon a capability to assure the second objective." Throughout the preparatory phase, then, the JCS reasonably assumed that any military action against Cuba should accomplish both objectives. Responding to a presidential query two days later, McNamara replied that he had "taken steps to insure that our contingency plans for Cuba are kept up to date." His memo detailed Navy and Air Force plans to attack the SA-2 missile sites using iron bombs, napalm, and 20mm cannon. Apparently concerned about

the resulting casualties from an attack on the SAM sites, McNamara, echoing LeMay's and Anderson's views, predicted that the SA-2 surface-to-air missiles could not hit the attacking American aircraft inasmuch as they would fly under the missiles' minimum effective altitude, although fire from adjacent anti-aircraft batteries would probably down some planes.[4]

Kennedy also moved on the diplomatic front. On 2 and 3 October, Secretary Rusk met in closed session with the Secretary General of the OAS and several Latin American foreign ministers. In all likelihood, he told them that the evidence of offensive weapons in Cuba was mounting, and that future American action against Cuba, including a blockade, was possible. Calling on the OAS for support, Rusk laid the groundwork for the future OAS vote sanctioning American action against Cuba and the Soviet arms shipments. In a communique released on 3 October, the ministers condemned the buildup and urged greater "individual and collective surveillance of the delivery of arms and implements of war and all other items of strategic importance . . . in order to prevent the secret accumulation . . . of arms . . . used for offensive purposes against the hemisphere." In anticipation of future deliberations, the communique added that the OAS "should stand in readiness to consider the matter promptly if the situation requires measures beyond those already

authorized . . . in light of new developments taking place in Cuba."[5]

Meanwhile, John Hughes and his DIA analysts were anxious to get a closer look at Cuba's SAM-studded western end. Armed with the latest reports from agents in Cuba and Colonel Wright's astute hypothesis, the DIA requested that COMOR arrange for the area around San Cristobal to be the object of the next U-2 mission. The Special Group met to discuss the ongoing Mongoose activities and consider this request on 4 October. Before turning to the U-2 overflights, Robert Kennedy insisted upon an increase in Mongoose sabotage operations. He told the group that his brother was concerned "over [the] developing situation" and wanted to dramatically increase sabotage activity. As a result, the Special Group instructed Lansdale to "give consideration to new and more dynamic approaches . . . [including] a plan for mining [Cuban] harbors." McCone urged approval of the U-2 mission, knowing full well what it was likely to reveal, but he was outvoted by the rest of the group, who still hesitated to allow overflights near the SAM batteries. Instead, they directed Colonel Steakley and the NRO to prepare a list of alternatives to direct overflights and present the list at a meeting five days later, which simply put off the day of reckoning.[6]

Concern over what awaited a U-2 flying over western Cuba prompted a reconsideration of the CIA's role in the U-

2 overflights. Throughout the summer and early fall, CIA pilots, most of whom had military experience, had flown the U-2 missions over Cuba in the agency's own aircraft. With the 1960 Francis Gary Powers fiasco in mind, the Special Group was still wary of an operational SAM shooting down one of the high-flying spy planes, and it now decided to hand the mission over to the military, specifically the Air Force's Strategic Air Command. "There was a great deal of sensitivity, indeed, tension, about what these flights would develop," recalled Roswell Gilpatric, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, "which finally had to be resolved by Bundy." "[He decided] that the Air Force should conduct the flights." Anticipating, or more likely, certain, that the flight over the western end would confirm earlier intelligence reports of ballistic missiles, this change in control of the U-2 missions was viewed as a necessary transition, since subsequent missions would have to be flown by SAC, owing to its larger inventory of aircraft and the increase in the number of required reconnaissance flights. The follow-on missions would be needed to fix the location of additional missile sites and reconnoiter those areas preparatory to an air strike or to an invasion. SAC "had more aircraft by far available for this mission than the CIA and the number of flights required exceeded the capabilities of the CIA during that period," McNamara later explained.[7]

Steakley, the Director of the Joint Reconnaissance Center, J-3 Operations Directorate of the Joint Staff, was ready to take over, as he had monitored and provided support for all of the CIA's overflights that summer and fall, and also had overseen the large number of peripheral electronic eavesdropping missions. The JRC, established during the Eisenhower administration, provided the JCS, the secretary of defense, the White House, and various intelligence agencies with information about military reconnaissance activities. The armed forces routinely conducted electronic and communications surveillance, air-sampling missions to check on nuclear weapons tests, and satellite, U-2 overflight, and low-level, overhead photography missions. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Steakley's JRC planned and coordinated these reconnaissance efforts based on intelligence assessments and targeting requests provided by the DIA, the CIA, and the service intelligence agencies. Before overhead photography missions were flown, the list of proposed targets required the approval of the JCS, the secretary of defense, and the Special Group. In practice, the latter, noted Steakley, "included the president." In early October, he recalled, a combination of intelligence sources "provided the fact that there were missiles being deployed in, put into places in Cuba and my job then was to prove it with photography. And that's what we did."[8]

The last CIA U-2 missions were conducted on 5 and 7 October. The 5 October flight photographed SAM sites at Manati, Senado, and Manzanillo, a small city on the Gulf of Guacanayabo, in the southeastern part of Cuba. The 7 October sortie revealed another pair of SAM sites at Chambas and Esmeralda, both situated in eastern Cuba. Unlike the flights in late September, however, these early October sorties were conducted from the periphery of Cuban airspace and the U-2s did not fly directly over their targets.[9]

Realizing that the time for military action against Cuba was fast approaching, Admiral Dennison took additional steps to ensure the readiness of the Atlantic commands. On 6 October, he passed the word to his subordinate commanders to prepare for the execution of the air strike and invasion plans by 20 October. By that date, all necessary supplies and ordnance were to be in position to support the contingency plans. Two days later, a Navy F4-H Phantom fighter-bomber squadron was deployed to Key West to further reinforce the southern air defenses, and on 10 October, TAC squadrons at McCoy, MacDill, and Homestead Air Force Bases in Florida began stockpiling ordnance for air strikes on Cuba.[10]

Command and control of the Cuban operations, including the air strike, the invasion, and the naval blockade, were Dennison's responsibility. The 1958 Defense Reorganization

Act made Dennison, who was also Commander-in-Chief Atlantic Fleet, the unified commander for the Atlantic Theatre of operations (CINCLANT), which included the Caribbean. On 18 October, the Joint Chiefs designated him as the overall commander for the upcoming Cuban operations. Although the 1958 Reorganization Act dictated that Dennison report directly to the JCS, he instead reported to Admiral Anderson, who on 19 October was designated by the JCS as its executive agent for the Caribbean operations. One day later, Dennison dissolved Joint Task Force 122, the joint command responsible for executing the contingency plans, and took direct command of all operations. Reporting directly to Dennison, who also retained the designation of Commander-in-Chief Naval Forces Atlantic (CINCNAVLANT), were the Army and Air Force component commanders in CINCLANT. Commander-in-Chief Army Atlantic (CINCARLANT) was General Herbert B. Powell, the Commander, U.S. Continental Army Command (USCONARC), headquartered in Fort Monroe, Virginia. Commander-in-Chief Air Force Atlantic (CINCAFLANT) was Commander Tactical Air Command, General Walter C. Sweeney. Both Powell and Sweeney were officially designated CINCARLANT and CINCAFLANT on 20 October. Moreover, the forces slated for CINCLANT's Cuban contingency plans, normally under the Air Force's Commander-in-Chief Strike Command (CINCSTRIKE), were officially transferred to Dennison's operational control on

22 October.[11]

Soon after Castro seized power in 1959, the JCS had developed several contingency plans for use in Cuba, and in mid-1961 they assigned responsibility for Cuban contingency planning to CINCLANT. Subsequently, CINCLANT created Joint Task Force 122 and designated Navy, Marine, Army, and Air Force units to be used in the Cuban contingency plans. JTF 122 was to be commanded by Commander, 2nd Fleet. By October 1962, the file of operational plans (OPLANs) included one plan for airstrikes, OPLAN 312, and two plans for an invasion, OPLANs 314 and 316. When Castro began to enlarge the Cuban Army beginning in 1960, these plans were revised periodically to take into account the new capabilities of Cuba's armed forces as revealed to American intelligence. Beginning in the spring of 1962, when more modern Soviet equipment began to arrive in Cuba, CINCLANT continuously updated OPLANs 312, 314, and 316, and adjusted the forces needed to implement them.[12]

Planning went into high gear in August. When intelligence revealed that month that the Soviets were constructing a sophisticated air defense system in Cuba, the Tactical Air Command devised an air strike plan to deal with Cuban air defenses, which included provisions to attack both the MiG fighters and the SA-2 missile sites. The strike was planned to precede a combined amphibious and airborne assault under either OPLAN 314 or 316. The

resulting plan, code named Rockpile, was approved by LeMay and accepted in late September by Dennison as OPLAN 312-62. It aimed at completely destroying Cuba's air order of battle and, after the existence of the ballistic missile sites was confirmed, preventing nuclear strikes against the United States.[13]

The two invasion OPLANs, 314 and 316, called for a combined airborne and amphibious assault in the Havana/Mariel area. OPLAN 316 allowed for a faster reaction time than 314, which meant that there were to be fewer troops in the initial assault wave. At first, the Joint Chiefs requested five days advance notice between the time that the "go" order was received from Kennedy and the moment the first wave hit the beach. On 17 October, the JCS increased this interval to seven days, so as to allow the entire 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force to land concurrently with the airborne divisions, speed up the arrival of the follow-on forces by two days, and permit a delay in the event of poor weather. Weighing these advantages, the JCS decided on 26 October to abandon all planning and preparation for OPLAN 314 in favor of 316. The initial assault wave was to be composed of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, the 2nd MEF, and the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade from Camp Pendleton, California. The invasion plan called for a parachute assault by the two airborne divisions south of Mariel and an assault over-the-

beach by the 2nd Marine division at Tarata, west of Mariel, supported by a combat command drawn from the 1st Armored Division. The follow-on forces included the Army's 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions and the remainder of the 1st Armored. The 2nd was to arrive over-the-beach at Tarata, while the 1st Armored and the 1st Infantry were to come ashore at the port of Mariel after it was secured by the airborne divisions and Navy SEAL teams. There was a possibility, recalled Rivero, "that the ships that were in the [Mariel] harbor might get underway at the time of the invasion and perhaps sink themselves at the entrance and block the harbor." As a result, it "would have made it impossible for me to bring the LST's. . . with the armor into Mariel." So Rivero arranged to "get some Navy sailors [SEALs] to jump in the first wave. . . to capture the ships and immobilize them," as well as to "rescue . . . [any] paratroopers" who landed in the water. The invasion plans also utilized a Joint Unconventional Warfare Task Force consisting of additional SEAL teams and Army Special Forces. The combined strength of the landing force was 109,000 men. After mid-October, when the intensified surveillance effort revealed more formidable forces than the planners had anticipated, the forces available for the invasion OPLANs were reevaluated.[14]

The Special Group reconvened on 9 October to consider COMOR's request to target the western end of Cuba.

Steakley reported that the most suspicious area, San Cristobal, was obscured by hills from the cameras of a U-2 flying along Cuba's periphery, so there was no alternative but to allow a direct overflight. The Special Group agreed to COMOR's request and forwarded it to Kennedy for final approval. Although certain of what the photos would confirm, Kennedy knew that the moment was fast approaching when he had to take some action, and he therefore approved the mission.[15]

Still trying to control the intelligence on the missile sites, Kennedy was stunned by Senator Keating's latest bombshell. On 10 October, he delivered a speech on the Senate floor in which he declared that "construction had begun on at least a half a dozen launching sites for intermediate range tactical missiles" in Cuba. Claiming that this information was "fully confirmed" and that his sources were "100 percent reliable," he demanded that Kennedy "let us have all the facts, and have them now." Kennedy was still alarmed about these intelligence leaks and of being forced to act too quickly should the Soviet deployment become public knowledge, so he immediately ordered McCone to impose even tighter restrictions on the dissemination of intelligence concerning offensive weapons in Cuba. This order, issued on 11 October, went into effect the following day, with the code word Psalm being designated for all intelligence concerning the Cuban-based

ballistic missiles and Il-28 bombers.[16]

Kennedy approved Steakley's target list on the 9th, but cloud cover delayed for five days the U-2 sortie scheduled to fly over the San Cristobal area, and it did not lift off until the morning of 14 October. This mission, code named Victor, was piloted by Air Force Major Richard Heyser. A second U-2, piloted by Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr., took off later in the day. Heyser piloted his aircraft south over the Yucatan Strait, turned to the east and, intercepting the exact longtitudinal bisecting San Cristobal, flew south to north over the island and snapped hundreds of pictures of the Cuban countryside. Anderson followed suit, and upon their return to Laughlin, they jettisoned the film capsules which were quickly transported by air to the CIA's National Photographic Intelligence Center in Washington. On 15 October, photointerpreters, scanning hundreds of frames, fixed the location of a battery of Soviet SS-4 Sandal medium-range ballistic missiles in a meadow near San Cristobal.[17]

Chapter Five

On the morning of the 16th, McGeorge Bundy notified Kennedy of the latest U-2 findings. "When I first told the president the bad news. . . his first reaction. . . was that more than words would be needed to respond to this Soviet challenge," Bundy recalled. He provided Kennedy with duplicates of the reconnaissance photographs later that morning. Kennedy may have let down his guard a bit. This secret, too, would soon be in Republican hands. He understood the political consequences of his earlier failure to act and lamented, "We've just elected Capehart in Indiana, and Ken Keating will probably be the next president of the United States." The U-2 photos, which were merely the "glamour ones," according to Colonel Steakley, provided irrefutable evidence of Soviet medium-range ballistic missiles in Cuba. For more than three months, Kennedy had delayed taking any action to halt the Soviet deployment, in all likelihood because he felt that he could not act without publishable evidence, which only the U-2s' cameras could provide. "Only now do we have the kind of evidence which we can make available to our allies in order to convince them of the necessity of acting," he said. Confronted with the hard photographic evidence, he now had no alternative but to act. His warnings to Khrushchev in early September that he would move decisively should offensive weapons be identified left him little

choice. Moreover, he might not succeed in limiting access to the U-2's evidence for very long. Sooner or later, probably sooner, word of the findings would leak out and add ammunition to the Republican arsenal. At bottom, Kennedy still shrank from confronting Khrushchev. "Last month I should have said. . . that we don't care," he sighed, articulating a notion that few in Congress, Republican or Democrat, would have accepted. But the missiles had to go, if not for the coming congressional elections, then for his own political future.[1]

Since learning of Khrushchev's plan in July, Kennedy had taken surprisingly few steps to prepare his administration to deal with the dilemma. Little effort was made by the president to follow-up on the studies that were ordered on 23 August and no comprehensive contingency plan was prepared to respond to the Soviet plan that had now fully revealed itself.

Upon entering office in 1961, Kennedy had allowed McGeorge Bundy and another adviser, Harvard Professor Richard Neustadt, to dismantle the formal NSC system erected by Eisenhower, but this now left Kennedy with no effective, established system for handling international crises. The bitter experience of the Bay of Pigs revealed this gaping defect in a government plagued by chaotic administrative habits and lacking firm presidential guidance. Having relied upon a small "war cabinet" of

advisers in dealing with Cuba once before, a scarred president called together a mixed bag of cabinet members and close associates, "many of whom," noted former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, the aged cold warrior now sought out by Kennedy for guidance, "had little knowledge in either the military or diplomatic field."[2]

That morning at 1150, the president convened the first meeting of the Executive Committee of the NSC, or ExComm, in the White House. From the beginning of the ExComm's deliberations, it was obvious that Kennedy intended to take some kind of action. "We're certainly going to. . . take out these. . . missiles," he said. The first meeting resulted in over an hour of rambling discussion during which the options open to Kennedy were tossed about the conference table and few concrete decisions were made. Secretary Rusk opposed military action and suggested instead that Kennedy send a quick message to Castro. "I think. . . that we ought to consider getting some word to Castro. . . and tell him. . . that Cuba is being victimized here, and that. . . the Soviets are preparing for destruction or betrayal," he said. Few in the group believed that diplomacy was the answer, however.[3]

The ExComm turned to the military options. "We could carry out an air strike within a matter of days," reported McNamara. General Taylor, the only member of the Joint Chiefs to participate in the ExComm meetings, laid out the

air strike plan favored by the JCS: attacks on the missile sites and the destruction of Cuba's air defense network, including the MiG fighters and Il-28 bombers. The comprehensive list of targets, already endorsed by McNamara, was necessary, continued Taylor, to prevent reprisals by the Cuban Air Force, reprisals that might include sending nuclear-armed MiGs or Il-28s against American targets. During the evening meeting, Rusk pushed diplomacy again, believing that "this might be the issue on which. . . Castro would elect to break with Moscow if he knew he were in deadly jeopardy." This talk of a diplomatic solution clearly no longer interested Kennedy, who appeared to dismiss this approach. "Can we get a little idea about what the military thing is?" he asked.[4]

Taylor again sketched the air strike plan advanced by the Joint Chiefs, arguing against a limited, "surgical" strike on the ballistic missile bases. "There was unanimity among all the commanders in the Joint Chiefs," he recalled, that a limited strike "may be detrimental." McNamara summed up the options: more diplomacy, a naval blockade, air strikes, or an invasion. Or, as Taylor put it, "talk the missiles out," "squeeze the missiles out," or "shoot the missiles out." The blockade, Robert Kennedy later noted, carried risks as great as the air strike. "Then we're gonna have to sink Russian ships," he observed, and "Russian submarines." Although the president's brother

was familiar with Schlei's "visit-and-search" blockade, the attorney general, very much the "hawk" in the early ExComm deliberations, clearly wanted to hit Castro quickly and even suggested fabricating an attack by Cuban forces on Guantanamo -- "sink the Maine again or something" -- as a catalyst for an American invasion.[5]

McGeorge Bundy finally asked a question which begged answering and which the errant discussions had failed to address. "How gravely does this change the strategic balance?" McNamara answered, "My own personal view is, not at all." And, moments later, he added, "I don't think there is a military problem here. . . . this is a domestic political problem," referring to Keating and the drumbeat of Republican criticism. Neither Taylor nor the JCS agreed with this view. "They can become. . .a very. . . important adjunct and reinforcement to the. . . strike capability of the Soviet Union," countered Taylor, perhaps alluding to the early warning problems outlined in September by the JSSC.[6]

The group next turned to Khrushchev's motivations. "Why does he put those [missiles] in there though?" Kennedy asked. "It's just as if we suddenly began to put a major number of MRBMs in Turkey. Now that'd be goddam dangerous." "Well, we did," Bundy quickly reminded him, a reference to the arsenal of Jupiter missiles recently stationed in Turkey. "Yeah, but that was five years ago,"

Kennedy replied, forgetting that the Jupiters were deployed during his first year in office. Trading the Jupiters for the Russian MRBMs received scant attention at the first ExComm meetings. It was a concession that none were prepared to make, although the president, in anticipation of the Russian deployment, had requested a study on removing the Jupiters in late August. Kennedy then suggested a road he had already traveled: warning Khrushchev through Dobrynin not to station ballistic missiles in Cuba. He recalled his 4 September written message to Khrushchev, Dobrynin's communication problems, the subsequent delay in receiving Moscow's response, and thought aloud that "we'd lose a week." When a bewildered George Ball twice asked, "How would we lose a week?" Kennedy ignored him and once again proposed telling Dobrynin that the presence of Soviet MRBMs in Cuba would cause "the most far-reaching consequences." But neither the 4 September gambit nor the follow-up 13 September warning had had any effect, and Kennedy lamented that "maybe our mistake was in not saying some time <u>before</u> this summer that if they do this we're [going] to act." A sharp warning at the time of the Raul-Malinovsky talks might have deterred Khrushchev from going ahead with the deployment.[7]

It was at this point that the group considered a blockade. Towards the end of the first session, McNamara suggested imposing a limited "search and seizure" blockade

on offensive weapons in conjunction with an ultimatum to Moscow. The failure to mention the Schlei "visit-and-search" plan illustrated that the ExComm was marvelously ill-informed of prior steps taken by Kennedy, including the several studies undertaken in August to evaluate the Soviet deployment. Instead, the ExComm discussed the options as if the Russians missiles were a new problem. Other than increasing the reconnaissance of the island and agreeing that news of the latest developments should be closely held to prevent leaks, these initial meetings accomplished little.[8]

During subsequent discussions, the ExComm divided into two camps: those who favored an air strike, and those who favored a blockade. The initial fervor for a lightning raid on the missile bases was diluted, in large part, by Robert Kennedy's sudden "dovish" conversion and his appeal that the nation, as well as his brother, not be tainted by a "Pearl Harbor"-style air strike, an analogy ridiculed by Dean Acheson as "thoroughly false and pejorative." The Soviets, held Acheson, had been warned not to station offensive missiles in Cuba, but had done so anyway, and now the United States had every right to remove or destroy them. To accomplish this, he favored a "surgical" air strike against the ballistic missile bases, aimed at swiftly removing the danger and presenting Khrushchev with a *fait accompli*. But the former secretary of state noted that

the "surgical" strike scenario was never really an option owing to the staunch opposition of the Joint Chiefs. The "surgical" strike, he recalled, "constantly became obscured and complicated by trimmings added by the military."[9]

This confusion about the differences between the "surgical" air strike and the comprehensive attack plan advocated by the JCS was never fully examined by the ExComm nor was the ExComm ever briefed as a committee on any of the operational plans. At this time, OPLAN 312, the contingency plan providing for air strikes, did not include a limited strike against the missile sites, but rather provided for an air offensive against Cuba in preparation for a combined airborne and amphibious landing. As a result of the ExComm's interest in a "surgical" strike option targeting only the missile bases, Taylor directed LeMay to revise his attack plans. Because of the resulting confusion and distaste for the proposed broad air attack, the group consensus soon moved towards a limited blockade on offensive weapons, the "squeeze them out" approach, advocated by many as a cautious first step. To Acheson, however, this seemed "a blunt instrument, ill-adapted to the purpose."[10]

On that same afternoon of the 16th, the JCS met to consider the military options for removing the ballistic missiles. They quickly agreed that a plan for selective strikes against only the MRBM bases was militarily unsound.

In a memo to McNamara the following day, they argued that any air strike must encompass "all missile sites, all combat aircraft and nuclear storage, combat ships, tanks, and other appropriate military targets in Cuba, in conjunction with a complete blockade." Only an attack on this comprehensive list of targets would ensure the safety of the strike force and destroy Castro's retaliatory capability. At the same time, only a complete blockade on shipping to Cuba would prevent both military and economic reinforcements from reaching the island. The air strike could be launched within twenty-four hours after authorization, and the 2nd Fleet was moving into a position from which to impose the blockade. To ensure that no missiles or warheads remained in Cuban or Russian hands, an invasion of the island was required, the chiefs added. Likewise, if "elimination of the Castro regime" became the political objective, American troops would have to invade Cuba.[11]

The JCS was given the opportunity to meet with a reluctant Kennedy on 19 October to present their "individual and corporate views" to him. They again recommended a surprise attack on the bases and any other target capable of a retaliatory response and a complete naval blockade of the island. The air strike, they admitted, was unlikely to destroy all of the missile launchers and might give the Soviets the opportunity to

disperse those undamaged into the Cuban jungle. To make certain all the missiles and the launchers were eliminated, the JCS told Kennedy that additional air strikes and an invasion would ultimately be necessary. The chiefs predicted that the Soviets would not retaliate against the United States, or at least that they would not initiate a nuclear exchange and World War III. Khrushchev's most likely move would be another Berlin blockade. Kennedy was unconvinced. He continued to fear a stronger Soviet reprisal if an American air strike or invasion killed Russian troops. The meeting, Taylor recalled, "may not have been particularly helpful to the president, but it certainly made the Chiefs feel better."[12]

Kennedy cast a wary eye on the opinions and advice offered by his military commanders. Since the Bay of Pigs, he had viewed much of the guidance from the Joint Chiefs with disdain and contempt, believing them to be blind to the political realities and risks of the modern world. This early morning brief on 19 October probably reinforced Kennedy's conviction that the JCS were unsophisticated bumblers whom he ought not to trust. "These brass hats have one great advantage in their favor," scoffed Kennedy. "If we . . . do what they want us to do, none of us will be alive later to tell them they are wrong."[13]

Unbeknownst to Kennedy and the ExComm, considerable disagreement over invading Cuba existed within the JCS and

its subordinate commands. "As a body [the JCS] never recommended the invasion of Cuba," according to Taylor, but did call for "merely the preparations for an invasion that would reinforce the President's hand" in dealing with Khrushchev. This was an inaccurate rendering of what really transpired. Admiral Anderson and Generals Wheeler and LeMay were unanimous in pressing for an invasion. Only Taylor abstained. "Once you invade Cuba," he argued, "what are you going to do with it? Sit on it for eternity?" Any invasion would plant "the seed of guerilla warfare against our occupying forces, and again tie down a large part of our conventional strength." The air strike, he believed, would provoke Khrushchev to voluntarily withdraw any remaining missiles. "You will have really shaken Khrushchev," he said. "He will know we're moving right in. He doesn't want us to invade either; and I felt there was a fair chance of him giving way on that point."[14]

Anderson was the strongest advocate of invading Cuba and of challenging Castro, not Khrushchev. He favored "going from one end of the island to the other" in a "massive invasion. . . coupled with a massive propaganda campaign of all sorts, leaflets, and radio broadcasts to get the support of the Cuban people." Members of CNO's staff, however, felt that an invasion would be far too costly in ships and men. Captain Caldwell's "Cuba Watch" committee had reported to Anderson and the JCS in early

October on a study they had done which examined the forces required for an invasion of Cuba. "The study," Caldwell observed, "asserted that an invasion would need 500,000 men, take six months to mount, and require the mobilization of twenty or so large civilian ships." OPLAN 316, however, called for only 109,000 troops. The JCS "did not comment on this latter requirement," he noted, "nor start any action to implement the recommendations of the study."[15]

Much of the Navy's concern involved the shortage of amphibious shipping available for the three Army divisions. Admiral Rivero's Amphibious Force embarked the initial assault wave of the 2nd MEF and could reserve only eight LSTs for Task Force CHARLIE, the combat command drawn from the 1st Armored Division. These LSTs, however, were not large enough to carry all of Task Force CHARLIE's heavy vehicles. Moreover, when the remainder of the 1st Armored was added to the follow-on forces, the need for additional LSTs and cargo shipping was immediate. Informed of these problems, Anderson ordered eleven LSTs activated from the Atlantic Reserve fleet and an additional twenty commercial cargo ships chartered. This was not done until 26 October, however. The World War II-vintage LSTs activated from the reserve fleet required extensive preparations and the commercial ships still had to be assembled at the embarkation ports before any invasion could proceed. Owing in part to these logistics problems, "even though our plans

did provide for it," said Dennison, "nobody. . . that I know of felt that invading Cuba was the right thing to do." Nonetheless, Dennison was under orders from the JCS, and he continued to prepare for an invasion.[16]

The available ExComm transcripts and memoranda demonstrate that Kennedy and his circle were poorly informed about the military planning. Except for the brief meeting on the 19th, the JCS did not participate in the ExComm deliberations, seldom saw Kennedy throughout the crisis, and relied solely on Taylor for information about the White House discussions. Kennedy's lack of confidence in his chiefs and his reliance on Taylor, combined with McNamara's ongoing, bitter dispute with Admiral Anderson over the Navy's next generation fighter, the TFX, added to the air of mutual distrust between the White House and the Pentagon. Yet, Taylor failed to explain adequately the differing views of the service chiefs to the ExComm, nor did he elaborate as to why he felt that an invasion need not necessarily follow an air strike. "They always emphasized the necessity of having an invasion follow the strike, and they told us we could expect thousands of casualties," McNamara recalled. The service chiefs did not protest their exclusion from the meetings, but they did believe that Taylor was not correctly representing their views. "The Chiefs had too many things to do to attend those meetings," said Anderson. "It was proper for the

chairman to attend, but there should be no impediment to the Chiefs knowing everything under those circumstances." Throughout the ExComm deliberations, and later during the secret negotiations with Khrushchev, information was "so tightly held" that "there was an inadequacy. . . in that flow of information to the Chiefs," the CNO complained. Taylor briefed the chiefs during their daily meetings, but the JCS, "for one reason or another, partially perhaps because of General Taylor's hearing impediment. . . were not getting the full story." McNamara, held in equal contempt by all the chiefs save Taylor, was happy with with the arrangements. "I'm just glad not all the Chiefs were in the ExComm," he later remarked. This tension and distrust ultimately led to even more friction as a showdown with the Soviets approached.[17]

The object of all this interest, Cuba, was being surveyed with increasing frequency. From the 15th to the 18th, SAC U-2s flew ten high-altitude reconnaissance missions over Cuba, scanning the countryside to pinpoint the location of additional ballistic missile bases. By the 19th, these overflights provided analysts with a complete, detailed mosaic of the island. Eight MRBM field launch sites were photographed, four at San Cristobal and two at Sagua la Grande. Each base harbored four missile launchers and eight SS-4 Sandal ballistic missiles, each capable of striking targets 1,100 nautical miles away. Two of the

sites at San Cristobal were thought to be ready to launch their missiles, or "operational," although the Americans still possessed no information as to the whereabouts of the nuclear warheads. Of all the material that the Soviets could conceal, the warheads were the easiest. "Of course, we didn't know there were no warheads in Cuba," recalled Garthoff. But "prudence dictated that we had to assume that they did have at least some of the warheads there." Photography of the Guanajay area, the same area photographed in late August, now clearly showed the ground clearings of four IRBM launch pads. Additionally, MiG 21 Fishbed fighters were photographed on the tarmac at Santa Clara, Camaguey, Holguin, and San Antonio de Los Banos airbases.[18]

As the high-flying U-2s were scanning the Cuban countryside, Admiral Anderson ordered his fleet to sea. Under the guise of a previously-scheduled amphibious exercise and a hurricane alert, ships of the Atlantic Fleet stood out of their berths at the Norfolk and Little Creek naval bases. Once clear of Thimble Shoals Channel, they turned south for the Caribbean, where Vice Admiral Rivero's Atlantic Amphibious Force was already at sea participating in PHIBRIGLEX '62. This exercise involved over 4,000 Marines who were to land via assault amphibians and helicopters on the small island of Vieques. On the 20th, the exercise, begun only five days earlier, was suspended

because of the impending Cuban operations, but Rivero's forces remained at the ready, poised to storm Cuba's beaches instead. On the 16th, in a movement scheduled earlier, the attack carrier Independence and her destroyer escorts steamed out of Norfolk and headed south to take up a position from which her air group might attack the missile bases if the order to do so arrived. The following day, Anderson ordered his numbered fleet commanders, including the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean and the 3rd and 7th Fleets in the Pacific, to ready their ships to get underway with only twenty-four hours notice. On the 19th, Rear Admiral Hayward's carrier division, centered on the nuclear-powered attack carrier Enterprise, with a detachment of Marine A4D Skyhawk light attack bombers added to her air group, having just completed a Mediterranean deployment, hurriedly followed the Independence. "My mission, as spelled out to me by Dennison and Beakley, was to be the task force commander for the attack force which had as its primary mission to destroy the missile sites located in Cuba," Hayward recalled. "After we had done the first task the second was to provide the air support for the proposed amphibious landing west of Mariel." The Enterprise's quick departure sparked speculation among reporters in Norfolk that something was afoot in the Caribbean, an observation quickly dismissed by Navy officials at CINCLANT, who explained that the onset of

Hurricane Ella had prompted her departure. That same day, the JCS, after meeting with Kennedy, assigned Admiral Anderson the responsibility for preparing a limited blockade of Cuba.[19]

In the ongoing ExComm meetings, held in tight secrecy owing to the fear of leaks, a consensus gradually formed in favor of imposing a naval blockade. Acheson bitterly opposed this scheme, likening it to "closing the door after the horse had left the barn." Moreover, he was frustrated by the lack of coordination, direction, and progress of the rambling debate, so he withdrew in disgust from the deliberations on the 18th. "After a couple of sessions," he wrote, the ExComm "seemed to me repetitive, leaderless, and a waste of time." He told Kennedy that his best move was a swift, limited air strike, and stormed out of the White House, bewildered at the proceedings he had just witnessed.[20]

Acheson was particularly incensed that Kennedy even bothered to give credence to his brother's "Pearl Harbor" analogy, which wore away at some of the air strike supporters. This appeal "impressed me a very great deal," recalled Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon. "I felt we just couldn't live" with a surprise air attack. The blockade supporters, led by McNamara, also thought that an air raid might prove to be difficult to justify to the OAS, whose support of American action was believed to be

critical for framing legal arguments. With Schlei's August study in mind, McNamara, Rusk, and Robert Kennedy "all agreed that we needed OAS approval and that meant we had to consider what we could get the OAS to approve," observed State Department official Abram Chayes.[21]

When the president, feigning a chest cold, returned on the 20th from a campaign trip in Chicago, a majority of the ExComm favored imposing a blockade as an initial step, although it was still unclear as to how this would lead to the withdrawal of the missiles. The latest U-2 photos revealed a concrete nuclear weapons storage bunker under construction near Guanajay, which in turn heightened fears that the missiles were or might soon be operational. But Kennedy was still reluctant to send in the strike force, and was swayed, too, by his brother's appeal. If, after the blockade was in place, the Soviets still refused to dismantle the bases, then the air strike could be launched. Once again, someone mentioned trading the Jupiter missiles in Turkey for the MRBMs in Cuba. There would be no deal on those, Kennedy said. Guantanamo, likewise, was not on the table. "We would have to be prepared," countered McNamara, "to accept the withdrawal [of the Jupiters and] possibly agreement to limit our use of Guantanamo to a specified time." The political consequences of either of these concessions, however, were severe. McNamara, a strong supporter of the limited blockade, was a consistent "dove"

throughout the deliberations, shrinking from any action that directly confronted the Soviets. Kennedy wanted to avoid firing the first shot, and so he agreed with the ExComm's recommendation, and directed that all preparations, including diplomatic steps, public statements, and naval movements, proceed towards the imposition of a limited blockade.[22]

Later, at an 1815 meeting, the JCS learned of Kennedy's decision. At the time of the president's TV speech, which was to take place on the 21st or 22nd and was designated 'P-hour,' all TAC forces earmarked for OPLAN 312 were to be ready for a "no-warning" strike within twenty-four hours. LeMay was told to revise OPLAN 312 so as to allow for selective strikes against any target or group of targets in Cuba. The resulting change divided the strike plan into three categories. Category I, code named Fire Hose, provided for the selective destruction of individual surface-to-air missile sites. Category II, code named Shoe Black, allowed for strikes against a larger number of targets, including SAM sites, ballistic missile sites, or airfields. The final category, designated Scabbards 312, provided for massive air strikes against every aspect of Cuba's military establishment. Two plans added later were code named Full House and Royal Flush. Full House targeted all of the SAM sites in Cuba, while Royal Flush attacked the entire Cuban air defense network. Preparations for the

execution of OPLANs 314 and 316 were to continue and American military commands worldwide were to go on a heightened alert status. McNamara also instructed Anderson to prepare the necessary position and policy papers, instructions, and directives for implementing the naval blockade. Shortly thereafter, Admiral Dennison issued CINCLANTFLT Operation Order 43-62, modifying order 41-62 to provide for a limited "search and seizure" blockade of Cuba.[23]

Down in Norfolk, in a move ordered personally by Admiral Anderson in early October, Vice Admiral Alfred G. Ward relieved Vice Admiral Jack Taylor as Commander, 2nd Fleet, three months earlier than scheduled. Earlier that year, Taylor had supervised a fleet weapons demonstration put on for Kennedy and a host of congressional dignitaries. According to Admiral Rivero, the exercise, intended to showcase the Navy's capabilities, "was a flop" and reflected poorly upon Taylor. Aware of forthcoming trouble with Cuba and concerned that "Jack . . . didn't have the stuff" for wartime operations, Anderson quickly brought in Ward for the job. "The decision was made with the president giving his approval," Ward noted, which "was unusual, too, because the president normally doesn't [do this]." Only hours after the change of command ceremony, Ward boarded a plane for a short flight to Washington. "During that forty minutes," he recalled, "Dennison briefed

me on the fact that we would blockade Cuba, that I would be the blockade commander, and that I would be in charge of all operations around the island of Cuba."[24]

The following morning, General Sweeney met with the president, McNamara, Robert Kennedy, McCone, and Taylor at the White House to review the latest plans and requirements for an air strike on the missile sites. Although the plan recommended initially by the JCS called for strikes against a comprehensive list of targets, Sweeney's attack plan was now limited to the missile bases and suppression of immediately surrounding air defenses, and was far from the massive strike envisioned by some members of the ExComm. A more "surgical" strike, one that hit only the missile launchers, was possible, but that would endanger the entire strike force and also reduce the chances of successfully destroying all of the launchers. In the first stage, forty Navy and Air Force light attack jets, using air-to-ground rockets, iron bombs, napalm, and 20mm cannon, were to strike the five SAM sites closest to the ballistic missile launchers. Twelve fighters were assigned to cover the nearby airfields to destroy any Cuban MiGs that tried to interfere. Each of the thirty-six known SS-4 launchers would then be bombed by six planes. Over 400 aircraft would be involved in the attack. Turning to another plan that allowed his planes to bomb the MiGs and Il-28s on the airfields, Sweeney estimated that an additional 100 sorties

would be required. This mission would take slightly longer than an hour. Nevertheless, with all this firepower at his disposal, Sweeney, correctly, still could not guarantee the destruction of all the missile launchers. "[You] can't expect me to get'em all; some of the missiles would get away," he said. While the prospects for complete success were high, a chance nonetheless existed that one or two launchers might escape damage from the first strike and be moved into the Cuban jungle. "The best we can offer you is to destroy 90% of the known missiles," said Taylor.[25]

After listening to Sweeney's brief, Kennedy again weighed the blockade and air strike options. Ultimately, thought Taylor, McNamara, and Sweeney, additional strikes would be necessary, and this would lead inevitably to an invasion to hunt down any remaining, undiscovered ballistic missiles. For reasons that surpass understanding, Taylor did not now advance his theory that an invasion would not be necessary and that the pressure on Khrushchev after the air strike would force him to remove any remaining missiles. And both McNamara and Robert Kennedy argued against such an opening blow. The air strike, "would be a Pearl Harbor type of attack," the attorney general said again, and might lead to a military response by the Soviets. Swayed by his brother's arguments, Kennedy agreed and approved the order for the limited naval blockade, but he also ordered that preparations for the air strike and

the invasion continue. Having failed to act during that summer to prevent the Russian missiles from arriving, Kennedy now took the line of least resistance in seeking their removal.[26]

Later that afternoon, Kennedy met with Admiral Anderson to discuss the Navy's blockade plans and procedures. He was particularly interested in the means which the Navy would use to stop vessels that refused to comply with the blockade instruction. Anderson told Kennedy that any ship which refused to answer hailing signals would first be warned with a blank shot. If the freighter proceeded, then the intercepting warship would fire a live round across her bow. In the event that she still refused to stop, which Anderson thought to be unlikely, then the American ship would fire a shot in the vicinity of her rudder, or another non-vital part, attempting to cripple the vessel but not sink her. Every effort would be made to avoid injuries and any loss of life. Unbeknownst to Anderson, however, Ward did not intend to fire on any renegade merchantmen to force them to stop, but meant to have "one of the larger ships [cruisers] ram it . . . to stop them." The captured prize would then be taken over by a prize crew of American sailors and Marines and brought into a nearby port. Kennedy, wary of a confrontation on the high seas escalating beyond his control, stressed to Anderson the political nature of the

Navy's mission and reviewed the rules of engagement. At the conclusion of the briefing, he said, "Well, Admiral, it looks as though this is up to the Navy." The CNO, conscious that he was participating in a historic moment, solemnly replied, "Mr. President, the Navy will not let you down."[27]

On the morning of the president's televised address, the administration informed the NATO allies and congressional leaders of the upcoming action. When the ExComm met, Kennedy agreed to a change in the wording of the instruction from "blockade" to "quarantine," so as to avoid the belligerent overtones inherent in the former and emphasize the benign character of the impending action. In addition, he had Dean Acheson return to the White House, told him of the plan, and asked him to fly to Europe to explain it to France's President Charles de Gaulle and West Germany's Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. British Prime Minister MacMillan was briefed by Ambassador David Bruce that afternoon. At Foggy Bottom, Rusk called in Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin and handed him a copy of the president's upcoming address. "I saw him age ten years right in front of my eyes," recalled the secretary of state. Dobrynin was evidently unaware of Khrushchev's gamble. Kennedy also met with congressional leaders to inform them of the ballistic missiles and the blockade decision. Their initial reaction was to demand immediate

air strikes, but Kennedy told them that the die was cast. "We knew their line would be hawkish, and we knew they'd be out for early blood," according to Sorensen. "We weren't going to go to Congress until we'd already decided what it was we were going to do."[28]

As P-hour approached, the JCS readied American forces worldwide for action. At 1200 on the 22nd, SAC put its strategic bomber force on airborne alert. Within half an hour, the first of sixty-six combat-loaded B-52 heavy bombers, or one-eighth of the strike force, began lifting off from SAC bases to take up orbiting stations around the country. From Fort Hood, Texas, Task Force Charlie, the combat command from the 1st Armored Division, began moving via railway to Fort Stewart, Georgia to board the tank landing ships. Worried that a Soviet demand for the removal of the Jupiters might provoke the Turks to launch them unilaterally, Kennedy ordered the JCS to impose tight security around the Jupiter bases. Responding to the presidential directive, the chiefs instructed General Lemnitzer, now NATO's supreme commander, to destroy or render inoperable the Jupiter missiles in Turkey if any attempt was made to fire them without orders from Kennedy. All American commands worldwide were directed to assume Defense Condition Three alert posture at 1900 Eastern Standard Time, the moment at which the president would appear on television and deliver his address.[29]

In Norfolk, the remaining ships of the Blockade Force prepared to put out to sea. At an early morning pre-sail conference with the ships' commanding officers on the 22nd, Ward told them about the upcoming action. "They were all highly enthusiastic," he said. "The consensus was that such action was long overdue." He directed them to quietly recall as many members of their crews as possible and told them that the ships' movements were to begin with little fanfare that evening. The captains hurriedly readied their ships to get underway. Emergency requisitions for supplies were placed and personnel were snatched off of idle ships to fill the places of absent sailors. At 2100 that evening, Ward boarded his flagship, the cruiser Newport News, and stood out to sea to join the rest of the blockade vessels already moving into position.[30]

In the Atlantic, the other warships of Ward's Blockade Force steamed toward predetermined positions near the quarantine line. "When the fleet units sailed they had no formal operational orders," recalled Captain John Carmichael, who supervised the CNO's Flag Plot during the blockade. "They were given directives to rendezvous at a latitude and longtitude." Most of the ships were not informed of the impending action, but were instructed instead to tune into the evening broadcast. "President Kennedy's speech provided the first definitive information on the mission," recalled Commander Charles Rozier, the

commanding officer of the destroyer Cecil.[31]

At Guantanamo, the American outpost on the fringe of southeastern Cuba, Rear Admiral O'Donnell continued to strengthen his defenses against a Cuban attack on the base. Under constant threat from Castro's forces, the base defenses were already well organized by October. That spring, heavy artillery pieces were positioned in the hills commanding the Cuban-controlled railroad yard in Guantanamo City. If the Cubans attacked the base, he reckoned that the yard would be the "debarkation point for their reinforcements." Throughout the summer months, during the initial phases of the buildup, O'Donnell had implemented some extraordinary precautions. The "first thing a visiting ship learned," he explained, "was counter battery fire against shore targets." The duty ship "would be on watch, alerted, . . . all night," ready to respond. Because the source of the base's fresh water supply was in Cuban territory, water barges were brought in and a small resevoir was dug near the firing range. Navy Seabee construction battalions worked with Marines to erect earthworks and bunkers along the perimeter of the base. By 22 October, three additional Marine infantry battalions were in position to defend Guantanamo, and they were supported by two F8U Crusader sections and offshore gunfire support ships. Over the horizon, another Marine battalion landing team was at sea within four hours steaming of the

base. The measures made O'Donnell so confident that he "never had any particular fear of what they could do to us. In fact, it's rather a shame they didn't try." The CNO, however, felt otherwise, and he ordered O'Donnell to evacuate all dependents and other non-combatants on 22 October. "We had to get our dependents and our civilians out of Guantanamo so they could not be held hostage," Anderson decided. Hustled aboard four amphibious ships, the evacuees, mostly dependents of sailors and Marines, were well underway to Norfolk by the time of the president's speech.[32]

At 1900 Kennedy addressed the nation from the Oval Office. In a seventeen-minute statement, he revealed what he knew about the Khrushchev's plan to turn Cuba into a strategic missile base. "To halt this offensive buildup, a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated." He demanded that Khrushchev "halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless, and provocative threat." He also asked for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council and the OAS. When he was done, he made his way down to the Situation Room to use the secure phones there to call MacMillan and assuage his fears of a reckless American action that might draw the world to the brink of war. Kennedy "seemed rather excited," recalled MacMillan, "but very clear. He could not tell what Khrushchev would do." After their brief

conversation, Kennedy, tapping his teeth, turned to Commander McCabe and chuckled, "Do you know what he told me? . . . Go slow young man, go slow."[33]

"It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States." When Kennedy announced the quarantine, several of the Soviet missile batteries were already operational. The CIA reported that two of the San Cristobal sites, or eight launchers, were ready to fire. "We understood operational to mean that everything was there that we needed to fire the missiles," recalled Garthoff. The DIA estimated that the entire launch sequence-- fueling, warhead mating, targeting, and counting down-- would take about eight hours to complete. The two bases at Sagua la Grande were also capable of launching their ballistic missiles. The IRBM sites at Guanajay and Remedios were still being constructed, however, and they would not be operational until 15 December.[34]

Soon after Kennedy's address, the Joint Chiefs issued the rules of engagement to CINCLANT for the Blockade Force. Drawn up by Captain Caldwell, approved by McNamara on the evening of the 21st, and sent out to the fleet two days later, these rules outlined Navy tactical procedures for searching and boarding ships already contained in Naval Warfare Publication 10-2. In addition to clarifying the

procedures outlined by Anderson to the president and McNamara, this fleet message, CINCLANTFLT 23170Z OCT 62, Operational Order 45-62, informed commanders that any "ship, including surface warships, armed merchant ships or submarines, or any aircraft which take actions which can reasonably be considered as threatening a U.S. ship. . . may be subjected to attack to the extent required to terminate the threat." In short, this authorized Blockade Force ships, if sufficiently threatened, to fire before being fired upon, authority already granted under existing peacetime rules.[35]

Although the rules of engagement contemplated dealing with Russian submarines challenging the blockade, this issue was never adequately considered by the ExComm or by Kennedy. The submarines, however, were a major concern for Anderson and his commanders. The CNO's meeting with Kennedy on the 20th had dealt only with the means of halting ships, but Kennedy, having reviewed the rules of engagement, knew that they also envisioned encounters with submarines. "We discussed what to do if submarines came into the area near our surface ships, and we issued guidelines that said they should be monitored," recalled McNamara. The fear that Russian submarines might escort merchantmen into the blockade zone, carry nuclear warheads to Cuba, or attack the invasion transports all required that they be included in the blockade order. Kennedy's

quarantine proclamation did not specifically mention hostile submarines, but it did announce that "any vessel or craft which may be proceeding toward Cuba may be intercepted." Dennison's order, issued to the Blockade Force on 23 October, specified that "all ships, including combatant, surface and *sub-surface*, . . . designated by CINCLANTFLT on basis of information available to him[,] will be intercepted by this force."[36]

Reports of Soviet submarines operating from Cuba had been received in Washington for some time. "We'd had low-level reports. . . that Soviet submarines would be based in Cuba, and the buildup of weapons in Cuba made these reports somewhat significant," Dennison recalled. The first visible indication that Russian submarines might be operating in the vicinity of the quarantine area came on 22 October, when Navy patrol aircraft photographed the Soviet replenishment ship Terek near the Azores. Alongside the Terek was a Zulu-class diesel-electric attack submarine which showed the signs of a lengthy deployment. "We had known that Soviet submarines were operating south of Iceland," Ward recalled, "but this was the first time we had found any as far south as Cuba." The Navy's SOSUS underwater listening arrays also picked up contacts. Under a project code named Caesar, these sensitive hydrophones were placed on the continental shelf off the East Coast, in the Caribbean, off Norway, and along Great Britain in the

1950's. "We had rather good information ever since we had SOSUS installed," recalled Vice Admiral Griffin. Kennedy was told that three Soviet submarines were heading for the Caribbean on the evening of the 23rd, and, according to Robert Kennedy, he instructed McNamara "to give highest priority to tracking the submarines and to put into effect the greatest possible safety measure to protect our own aircraft carriers and other vessels." This caused McNamara, worried that American warships might use unauthorized force against a Soviet submarine, to return to the Pentagon and order that specific signaling and surfacing procedures be issued to the blockade forces -- a step that had not been previously taken.[37]

These procedures, prepared by Griffin and Dennison's staff, explained how to signal a submarine to surface and were not a normal part of the Navy's peacetime ASW routine. They authorized American ships to drop four or five small explosive charges into the water to signal a Russian submarine to surface. The charges, called MK 64 Practice Depth Charges, were equivalent in explosive force to a hand grenade, and were used often in ASW exercises as they were quite harmless to a submarine. In addition to the PDCs, commanders might use Morse code sonar signals to transmit "IDKCA," which meant "rise to surface." If all went according to plan, the Soviet submarine, upon receiving these signals, was to surface on an easterly course,

heading away from the quarantine zone. The surfacing procedures, transmitted to the Blockade Force five hours before the quarantine went into effect on 24 October, were broadcast to the world the following day in a "Notice to Mariners No. 45-62, Special Warnings Nos. 30-33." To clarify American intentions towards Soviet submarines, a Pentagon spokesman also announced on the 25th that any submarine which refused to comply with the instruction and did not surface would be subject to the "minimum amount of force necessary" to permit a search of the vessel. If sufficiently threatened, American warships might attack with full-scale depth charges. Our "ships had to be able to protect themselves," said McNamara, and "for that reason, they were authorized to force the subs to surface." Both Kennedy and McNamara were aware that the quarantine instruction included submarines, but neither apparently grasped the full import of the Blockade Force's ASW activities on the crisis.[38]

With the stage set for a high seas showdown, the administration scrambled to gather international support for the quarantine. At an OAS meeting early on the 23rd, Rusk urged an approving vote for Kennedy's policy. He emphasized the threat of the Soviet missiles to the entire Western Hemisphere and asked the Council to "take the measures necessary to insure that this buildup does not continue to receive additional offensive weapons." The

resolution put before the Council that afternoon called for "the immediate dismantling and withdrawl from Cuba of all the missiles" and recommended that member states "take all measures, individually and collectively. . .to ensure that the Government of Cuba cannot continue to receive" offensive material from the Soviet Union. The groundwork laid by Rusk in early October now paid off and the resolution was unanimously approved that same afternoon. The results quickly reached Adlai Stevenson at the UN, who was speaking at the time before the Security Council about the Soviet encroachment into the hemisphere. Stevenson, in the first in a series of Security Council meetings on the missile crisis, called for the immediate removal of the missiles under the auspices of a UN observer team. The Soviet UN ambassador repeatedly denied the American charges, however.[39]

That same afternoon, the JCS ordered Navy and Air Force reconnaissance squadrons in Florida to initiate a series of low-level photography flights over the ballistic missile bases. These long-awaited flights would provide analysts and air strike planners with sharper and more detailed photographs of the ongoing Soviet activity at the missile sites. Shortly after the U-2 overflight on the 14th, Colonel Steakley had met with Kennedy to ask permission to start the low-level missions. "I sat in front of Mr. Kennedy and said, 'We really need these

flights,' and he said to me, 'I know you want to do it, Colonel, but I gotta helluva lot more to worry about than those damn overflights." Kennedy resisted Steakley's request owing to his concern that these flights might alert the Soviets and Cubans to the fact that the Americans knew about the ballistic missile bases. He waited until after his televised speech on the 22nd, and then authorized the flights to begin.[40]

The low-level missions considerably enhanced American understanding of Soviet deployments. From 23 October to 15 November, 158 of these missions, code named Blue Moon, were flown by Navy F8U Crusader and Air Force RF-101 Voodoo photoreconnaissance jets. Coordinating the planning procedure with CINCLANT and the photoreconnaissance squadrons in Florida, Steakley and the squadron commanders drew up operational plans for the first missions, basing their decisions on intelligence provided by the DIA. Subsequent flights were coordinated entirely by CINCLANT and submitted to the president for approval via Steakley in the Joint Reconnaissance Center. "I briefed [the president] and presented the overall operational plans," he recalled, "which included targets, entry and exit of aircraft, and timing." The low-level missions, flown at speeds in excess of 500 knots under the SA-2's 1,200-foot minimum ceiling and going in without fighter escort, were closely monitored by the White House. The possibility that

a plane might be shot down by antiaircraft fire or by a Cuban MiG was not far from Kennedy's mind, so he kept close track of the low-level sorties. When a flight was in the air, an officer at CINCLANT Headquarters in Norfolk "would sit there with a phone at his ear with a guy up at the Pentagon on the other end," according to Rear Admiral Paul E. Hartmann, Dennison's Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations. "If anything happened, it was to be relayed back immediately." From the Pentagon "word traveled quickly to the White House." The pilots were under strict orders to abort the mission if fired upon, and if they missed any part of the target, they were not to turn around for another pass. Failure to comply with these orders brought swift punishment. "We had one poor fellow," recalled Hartmann, "that looked like, from the pictures, he'd made another pass and he was hauled up to the White House." These first low-level flights took pictures which showed that the Soviets, despite Kennedy's ultimatum, were continuing with their preparations to ready the missiles for firing.[41]

Chapter Six

Armed with the quarantine order and the revised rules of engagement, Admiral Ward's 2nd Fleet now made ready for action. He had divided his fleet into several elements, one being Task Force 136, the Blockade Force, which he would personally command and which was responsible for tracking, intercepting, and boarding suspicious ships designated by CINCLANT. Rear Admiral John W. Ailes in the cruiser Canberra commanded Task Group 136.1, which included the destroyers that would man the quarantine stations. An ASW hunter-killer group, Task Group 136.2, built around the ASW carrier Essex, was to provide air support and surveillance for the surface ships and assist in prosecuting submarine contacts. The ASW effort in the Atlantic was led by Task Force 81 and Task Force 83, under the command of Vice Admiral Edmund B. Taylor, who was the commander of the Atlantic Fleet ASW Force. Task Force 81 consisted of ASW patrol planes operating from air stations all along the eastern seaboard and Task Force 83 was composed of four ASW hunter-killer groups which steamed in and around the quarantine zone. Working around the clock to keep the combatants fueled and fed, Task Group 136.3, the Mobile Logistics Support Group, included a host of vital replenishment ships from the Atlantic Fleet's Service Force. Prowling the waters closer to Cuba were the attack carriers of Task Force 135, centered on the Enterprise and

Independence and under Rear Admiral Hayward's command. From 20 to 23 October, both ships operated northwest of the Bahama Islands. On the 23rd, however, Hayward moved his carriers to an operating area between Cuba and Jamaica, so as to be prepared to support Guantanamo if the need arose. In total, 183 ships representing the might of the Atlantic Fleet patrolled the waters around Cuba. "Whatever we did," recalled Captain Kidd, the CNO's executive assistant, "it had to be credible to the Soviets. . . so there could be no question that we came with enough power to the ball game to win."[1]

If Kennedy's quarantine failed to bring about the withdrawal of the Soviet ballistic missiles, then Rivero's Amphibious Force was responsible for securing a beachhead for the follow-on Army divisions. Now assembling in the Caribbean, his amphibious transports were loaded down with the 16,500 troops of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force, commanded by Lieutenant General Robert B. Luckey. Ships from Amphibious Group Three, detached from the Pacific Fleet, carried the 10,900 men of the Fifth Marine Expeditionary Brigade. On 8 November, the ships carrying the 5th MEB completed their transit through the Panama Canal. Thus, it was not until the second week of November that Rivero's full invasion force, now designated Task Force 128, was in position for an amphibious assault.[2]

The command and control structure through which this

massive assemblage of naval power was maneuvered began in Flag Plot in the Pentagon, where Admiral Anderson oversaw the movements of his fleet. The brainchild of his predecessor, Admiral Arleigh Burke, Flag Plot was the nerve center of the Navy's Cuban operations. This cramped, airtight space contained oversized charts of the Caribbean which depicted the positions of the various naval forces and merchant shipping. After Anderson was designated the executive agent for Cuban operations by the Joint Chiefs, the duty captain in Flag Plot erected status boards showing the disposition of all the forces involved -- Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force. Electronic teletype machines and long-range radios allowed instant communications with the ships at sea and the air forces and troops being assembled ashore. In one corner, behind a secure door, was the top secret intelligence plot, the room which contained charts showing the positions of American and Soviet submarines. Just before the quarantine went into effect, the entire area was upgraded to a top secret classification, so that admittance was limited to a select few. While the Joint Staff also maintained its own control center for operations, "Flag Plot became the command center for the Defense Department," recalled Captain John H. Carmichael, who supervised the complex during the crisis.[3]

Across the Potomac at the White House, much of the information available in Flag Plot was duplicated in the

Situation Room for President Kennedy and the members of the ExComm. While not as detailed as the Flag Plot charts, Commander McCabe maintained a plot of the destroyers along the quarantine line and all sightings of Soviet-owned and Soviet-chartered merchantmen. Soon after the initial submarine contacts were reported, "we did take up some plot on that," he recalled. Although the information was available, none of the ExComm members, noted McCabe, "even bothered to look at the plot." The ExComm was seemingly oblivious to the whole problem of the Soviet submarine threat, not grasping the full import of their presence, a disinterest that confirmed Dean Acheson's observation that few of the ExComm members had a grasp on the military issues involved.[4]

How the quarantine line was established puzzled observers at the time and historians since. Early on the morning of 24 October, Ward's Blockade Force established the initial quarantine zone, defined by an arc drawn 500 miles from the easternmost tip of Cuba. According to Captain Kidd, Anderson fixed the 500-mile distance based on the range of Cuban Air Force combat aircraft. "The location of the initial line," he observed, "keyed to the combat radius of the best aircraft on the island of Cuba." Using a piece of string cut to the appropriate distance, Anderson "struck an arc on this big wall map behind his desk and. . . that was the quarantine line." After

discussions with Anderson, Admiral Dennison passed along this distance requirement to his staff, and they worked with Ward on a plan to establish the blockade stations. At a JCS meeting on the 20th, the 500-mile requirement was again discussed at length. Ward, having just assumed command of the 2nd Fleet that morning, objected to the placement of Anderson's line on the grounds that the distance was "excessive and resulting in the utilization of too many ships." General Taylor concurred, calling it a "foolish provision." According to the latest intelligence reports, the Il-28 bombers, with a combat radius of just over 700 miles, were only now being uncrated and assembled. Hence, the only aircraft that might menace the Blockade Force were the MiG-21 fighters, by far the most capable aircraft on the island. Taylor argued that 180 miles was adequate and "Anderson agreed with this, but the other Chiefs were less than enthusiastic, and no firm decision was made," Ward recalled. But, as a result of this meeting, the JCS eliminated the 500-mile requirement from its blockade directive, which was formally issued on the 22nd. In its place was the simple stipulation that the line remain beyond the reach of Cuban weapons. In the order transmitted to Ward on the 23rd, however, Admiral Dennison elected to retain the earlier requirement, but he authorized Ward to "vary stations at his discretion."[5]

Although Robert Kennedy later wrote that the

president, acting on a suggestion from British Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore, ordered that the blockade line be moved back to 500 miles from an initial distance of 800 miles, in fact the line was never further out than 500 miles and was not moved closer to Cuba until 29 October. In a late evening conversation with Kennedy on the 23rd, Ormsby-Gore reportedly suggested that Kennedy draw the line closer to Cuba so as to allow Khrushchev more time to ponder challenging the blockade. "Why not give them more time," he asked, "to analyze their position." Sharing Ormsby-Gore's concern, the "President called McNamara and shortened it to five hundred miles," wrote Robert Kennedy. The evidence does not support this account. In all likelihood, the president, acting on the the British ambassador's suggestion, asked how far the blockade line was from Cuba, and learned at this time about Ward's intention to intercept and shadow the Soviet merchantmen before they actually crossed the 500-mile arc. It was undoubtedly during this discussion that he directed that Ward not make any boarding attempts without his authorization. Kennedy did not issue instructions prohibiting intercepts beyond the 500 mile line, for on the first day of the quarantine, Ward ordered the destroyer Lawrence to intercept the Poltava at a position which was well beyond the blockade line. "Intercept" did not mean "stop and board," and the latter required the president's

authorization regardless of whether or not the ship was within the quarantine zone. "In other words," recalled Dennison, "the line wasn't necessarily static. We just didn't sit there. We knew where these ships were and went out to intercept them."[6]

On the 24th, the day that the quarantine proclamation took effect, Ward informed Dennison of his "intention later to move stations closer to the Bahamas but to keep them sufficiently distant to insure intercept of suspicious contacts during daylight hours to eastward of the island chain." Five days later, Dennison, upon deciding that Cuba's few aircraft posed little threat to the Blockade Force, agreed that Ward might rearrange his forces so as to cover only the passages through the Bahama Islands. This move "meant fewer ships and a tighter operation," Dennison noted. "It really didn't have any great significance." In short, the exact position of the blockade line was something of a fiction. It had operational meaning for Task Force 136, but little or nothing to do with the decision as to where or whether to stop and board suspicious vessels. It was not until the 27th that Kennedy assigned the line any real significance. On that day, he instructed the State Department to officially inform Moscow of the limits of the quarantine zone, and that any Soviet vessel within its borders was subject to search and seizure. Indeed, on the first morning of the blockade,

American warships were told when to stop the Soviet merchantmen, not where.[7]

The quarantine proclamation took effect at exactly 1000 on the 24th. Before dawn that morning, according to the Navy's shipping intelligence, seventeen Soviet dry cargo ships and five tankers in the Atlantic were enroute to Cuba. This number included three large-hatch vessels that were suspected of carrying ballistic missiles, the Poltava, Okhotsk, and Orenburg. While Anderson knew what ships were enroute to Cuba, their exact positions had yet to be fixed. As McCabe summed up the problem, "We knew the ships had left, we knew that the missiles were in the ships, but we had no idea where in the hell those ships were." Along the East Coast, radio detection-finding stations triangulated the approximate positions of some of the Soviet vessels, but long-range air reconnaissance was necessary to visually identify each ship, examine any deck-loaded cargo, and vector Ward's warships to intercept them, as well as to locate additional merchantmen not picked up by radio transmissions. To pinpoint the Soviet freighters and locate those vessels that had escaped detection by the radio tracking stations, Anderson had ordered a massive aerial surveillance effort which was already underway. The long-range P-2V Neptune workhorses flew continuously to cover over 4,500,000 square miles of ocean. From all points of the compass, including Key West, Jacksonville,

Norfolk, Bermuda, and the Azores, these aircraft scoured the mid-Atlantic for Soviet-flagged ships and charters heading for Cuba, but the Navy's patrol wings did not contain enough aircraft to conduct the entire search. Moreover, the unsettling discovery that Soviet submarines were as far south as the Caribbean prompted an ocean-wide submarine hunt, and this required the services of many of the P-2V Neptunes. Desperate for more aircraft to aid in the search for the freighters, Anderson humbly asked General LeMay on the 24th for Air Force assistance. LeMay happily agreed, responding that his birds "could locate all ships in the Atlantic within four hours." Diverting bombers from SAC's B-52 airborne alert force to join the effort, he lived up to his word. "Not only did he fly every single plane the Air Force had out over the Atlantic," recalled McCabe, "but they sent in every single contact report, from a fishing smack, to the biggest vessel they could find floating on the Atlantic and they swamped the White House Situation Room." Likewise, down at CINCLANT headquarters in Norfolk, the contacts could not be plotted "as fast as they were called in by USAF reconnaissance." The Air Force, noted McCabe, "just wanted to rub the Navy's nose in it, and they did." Before the blockade took effect, the first Soviet ships to approach the quarantine line were put under continuous aerial surveillance.[8]

Two of these suspicious ships were the freighters Kimovsk and Poltava, and Dennison now decided that they would be the first vessels that Ward's blockade Force would intercept. Intelligence indicated that the Poltava, and possibly the Kimovsk, were carrying ballistic missiles. Both vessels were well beyond the 500 mile arc, but Ward ordered the destroyer Lawrence to proceed at flank speed to intercept and shadow the Poltava, although the Soviet freighter was not due to enter the designated quarantine zone for another day. The Kimovsk was expected to cross into quarantine zone on the evening of the 24th, and Ward assigned the Essex hunter-killer group to intercept her.[9]

According to Robert Kennedy's version, the president and the ExComm in the White House anxiously awaited news of the Soviet ship movements. "I think that these few minutes were the time of gravest concern for the president," recalled Robert Kennedy. The tension was heightened, he wrote, by a "Navy report that a Russian submarine had moved into position between two ships," identified as the Komiles and Gagarin. This account bears little relation to what really transpired.[10]

There were no attempts by Soviet submarines to convoy merchantmen through the blockade and, contrary to the attorney general's quaint fabrication, the Essex was not ordered to prosecute a submarine contact near the Kimovsk, which he mistakenly identified as the Komiles. Informed by

Dennison of three positive submarine contacts in or near the quarantine zone that morning, Ward specifically assigned the Essex hunter-killer group to intercept the Kimovsk inasmuch as the carrier was best equipped to handle a confrontation with a Soviet submarine. No contact was made, however, and the suspicious Soviet ships, scattered across the Atlantic, gradually slowed down and reversed course to avoid the American blockade. "The [missile carrying] ships never got much beyond the Azores," recalled Anderson. Shortly thereafter, Ward received "information from the highest authority [that] prescribed: Do not stop and board. Keep under surveillance. Make continuous reports."[11]

The elation was short-lived, however, for that evening Kennedy received a message from Khrushchev declaring that Soviet ships would not heed the American blockade and would instead resist any attempt to stop and board them. He warned that the "Soviet government cannot give instructions to the captains of Soviet vessels bound for Cuba to observe the instructions of Amerian naval forces blockading the island." The president soon learned that only fourteen of the twenty-two Soviet ships bound for Cuba had reversed course. Of the remaining eight, five were tankers and three were freighters. The Soviets "blinked", but had yet to flinch.[12]

To reinforce his hand in dealing with Khrushchev, an

unpredictably volatile figure, Kennedy ordered that America's strategic retaliatory forces be made combat ready, with the result that the Strategic Air Command increased its alert status to Defense Condition Two, or deployed for combat. Within an hour of receiving this order, General Thomas Powers, the SAC Commander, reported that over ninety percent of the nuclear weapons-bearing missiles and bombers were at the ready. At the height of the alert, SAC fielded 1,436 bombers, 145 ICBMs, and 916 tankers for air-to-air refueling. In an unusual move unknown to Kennedy or the ExComm, Powers also broadcast these normally encrypted alert orders in the clear in order to put Moscow on notice that SAC was deployed and ready. For his part, Admiral Anderson ordered two Polaris submarines to steam to their assigned patrol areas in the Norwegian and North Seas. Six Polaris boats, out of an eight-boat force, were already at their assigned launching stations. From the American naval base at Holy Loch, Scotland, the fleet ballistic missile submarine Abraham Lincoln stood out to sea for her deterrent patrol area within fifteen hours of setting Defense Condition Three. She was followed in early November by the Thomas A. Edison.[13]

As the deterrent force was made ready, the first positive contact with a Soviet submarine occurred on the afternoon of the 24th in the Atlantic, and this marked the

opening round of what Vice Admiral Griffin termed "an absolutely magnificent ASW workout." Over the next two days, the ASW forces located five Foxtrot-class diesel-electric Soviet attack submarines. "It was some surprise to me when we found they were operating so close," recalled Ward. One of the contacts, designated C-21, was caught prowling the waters near the Windward Passage and attempting to close Hayward's two attack carriers. The surprisingly aggressive Soviet submarine forced Hayward's formation to move off station and shift to a new operating area south of Jamaica, where shoal waters made submarine operations difficult. The carriers were forced to use "evasive steering [and] zig-zagging" maneuvers so as to confuse the Soviet captain. The Foxtrot was eventually discouraged by American destroyers, who sat on top of the submarine and pinged it mercilessly with active sonar. Taylor's ASW forces found the four other contacts, designated C-18, C-19, C-20, and C-23, in the North Atlantic. Wary of other Soviet submarines making their way south into the blockade zone, Taylor ordered his ASW forces to activate the "Argentia Sub-Air Barrier." Formed with seventeen P-2V Neptune patrol planes and ten attack submarines, this barrier was in effect from 27 October to 13 November, during which time the ASW forces acquired no new contacts.[14]

Except for the signalling procedures devised

specifically for the blockade operations and issued on the 24th, the Navy prosecuted submarine contacts according to peacetime guidelines. "The rules were fairly standard operating procedures," recalled Commander John M. Dinwiddie, the commanding officer of the destroyer Hank, who helped to hunt down and bring to the surface one Soviet submarine. He said that the Hank "operated under peacetime rules of engagement -- aggressively pursue the contacts but do not use deadly weapons." Not all of the ships and aircraft involved in hunting the Russian submarines were aware of the specialized signals, however. "No other rules other than those provided in ASWFORLANT (ASW Forces Atlantic) peacetime instructions were provided," confirmed Commander Rozier. Deadly force "was not authorized for any contact not responding to instructions," according to Dinwiddie, although one frustrated commanding officer hounding a Soviet submarine requested and was denied permission to drop a lethal, full-strength depth charge. "Forcing" a submarine to the surface most often entailed a relentless tracking effort by the destroyers inasmuch as the Soviet captain desperately tried to elude his pursuers. Eventually, the Soviet submarine had no choice but to surface to engage her diesel engines and recharge her depleted electric storage batteries. Of particular interest, however, was that every Soviet submarine surfaced completely, rather than remaining at snorkel depth which

required to recharge its batteries. "The Russian subs surfaced completely rather than snorkeling in order to avoid any question that they were engaged in a hostile attack," Dinwiddie noted. As a result of this mutual caution, despite considerable fear beforehand, the chance of hostilities resulting from the ASW operations was slim. Encounters between the Navy's ASW forces and Soviet submarines were not uncommon throughout the world at the time and both the Soviet and American navies understood the unwritten rules of the chase.[15]

Despite Garthoff's contention that the Navy's ASW forces pursued their quarry "with such zest that one damaged Soviet submarine eventually had to limp back to the Soviet Union on the surface," no Soviet submarines were damaged as a result of the American ASW operations. Two of the Soviet submarines were observed making repairs soon after surfacing, but they were not damaged by PDCs, the harmless explosive signalling charges. Contact C-20 surfaced on 2 November, however no PDCs were used to signal her to surface. The other incident, involving contact C-18, which was taken under tow by the Soviet tug Pamir on 9 November to return her to port, most likely was the result of a machinery casualty. Even in the unlikely event that a PDC detonated near the hull, "it simply could not damage a submarine," said Captain Donald L. Lassell, a destroyer division commander stationed at Key West, where the Navy's

ASW training center was located. Upon surfacing, the Soviet submarines were on the prescribed easterly course, which indicated that they might have received prior instructions from Moscow directing them to return to port or had been informed of the American instructions regarding their conduct. The Soviet captains were undoubtedly humiliated by being forced to surface in the presence of the American Navy. The submarine pursued by the Cecil, for instance, when queried as to her name and condition upon surfacing, responded in international Morse code that she was "USSR KORABLEX," meaning "USSR SHIP X." Her captain was "undoubtedly embarassed at having lost the game of cat and mouse between surface ship and submarine."[16]

While the Navy aggressively prosecuted submarine contacts, Kennedy and McNamara apparently viewed the ASW effort as nothing more than a necessary adjunct to the blockade. It is possible, however, that the effort was used as a means to transmit a political signal to Moscow regarding the gravity of the crisis and Kennedy's intention to hold his ground. "It did not particularly create any problems for the Navy operationally," remarked Anderson, "that McNamara wanted to send political signals with" the ASW operations. Yet, it is unlikely that Kennedy or McNamara were so calculating, as the ASW operations received far less scrutiny from the White House than did other tactical level operations, particularly intercepting,

stopping, and searching the Soviet merchantmen.[17]

The second morning of the blockade brought renewed anxiety for Kennedy and the ExComm as this was to be the first occasion when Soviet-flagged ships crossed into the quarantine zone. Intercepted by the Essex and the destroyer Gearing, the Soviet-flagged tanker Bucharest was hailed by a flashing light signal. After the customary dipping of colors, she was allowed to proceed unchallenged while Kennedy and the ExComm seesawed back and forth over whether to stop the vessel. "Bucharest was tracked on and off for the next few days," Ward observed, "with orders coming from Washington to track her, then to trail her out of sight within radar range, then to discontinue trailing, then to resume contact and resume trailing." The indecision ended that evening, when Kennedy finally chose to allow the tanker to continue on her way without boarding.[18]

On the 25th, after just over twenty-four hours, Kennedy's quarantine had thus far failed to challenge any Soviet-flagged vessel and had proven to be little more than a traffic nuisance for merchantmen bound for Cuba. Desperate to establish the validity of the blockade yet anxious to avoid a direct confrontation with the Soviets, he now ordered Ward's Blockade Force to stop and search the hapless Lebanese freighter Marucla which was under charter to the Soviet Union. Although she was flying the Hammer

and Sickle, the Marucla was a benign object for a search, and JFK knew that Beirut was in no position to protest. The destroyer Pierce intercepted the Marucla that morning, and Ward received the order to board her from Vice Admiral Beakley, Dennison's deputy, that afternoon. Ward relayed it to the Pierce, but she had already stopped tailing the freighter and had broken off to refuel. Beakley was concerned, and he made contact with Ward again and repeated that "it was of the greatest importance to stop and board Marucla." Ward, responding to the worrisome message, now turned to Task Group Alpha, the ASW hunter-killer group on station inside the quarantine zone. Shortly thereafter, aircraft from the carrier Randolph catapulted into the late afternoon sky to locate the phantom freighter. In little time, the trail was picked up and the location of the Marucla pinpointed, and the Pierce, monitoring the aircraft broadcasts on the radio net, requested and received permission to resume the shadow. Ward also directed the destroyer Joseph Kennedy to join the Pierce for the intercept. "Beakley had suggested that it would be nice if Kennedy was one of the first ships to board a ship suspected of carrying forbidden cargoes," said Ward, who ordered that the Marucla be stopped and searched at first light.[19]

At 0600 the following morning, the Pierce closed on the Marucla and ordered her to heave to and prepare to be

boarded. The Greek captain was happy to oblige the two American destroyers and responded promptly to the Pierce's signals. Led by the executive officers of both destroyers, Lieutenant Commanders D.G. Osborne and K.C. Reynolds, an unarmed boarding party in service dress white uniforms took a whaleboat over to the Soviet-flagged vessel. The party began their search with the ship's log, but that proved to be of little value as it was written in Greek longhand. After a two-hour search of the deck-loaded cargo and a brief inspection of the holds, Reynolds cleared the vessel to continue. "No prohibited materials were on board so I therefore recommended that the SS Marucla be cleared to proceed," he reported. Throughout the entire procedure, a running account of the search was relayed back to CINCLANT Headquarters in Norfolk and to the CNO's Flag Plot at the Pentagon, and it was closely monitored in the White House Situation Room. Satisfied that no prohibited material was on board, Ward allowed the Marucla to proceed. "We stopped and searched her and found no implements of war on board," he recalled. Kennedy's decision to stop the Marucla was at once a signal to Moscow that he intended to enforce the blockade and a confession that he hoped to avoid a more direct confrontation by stopping Soviet-owned shipping in international waters.[20]

There is some confusion as to what Kennedy's boarding party found during their inspection of the Marucla. The

Director of Plans of the Air Staff in the Pentagon, General David Burchinal, maintained that contraband was located and ignored, but all other evidence suggests that the boarding party found none. Burchinal, who may have been monitoring the search in the Joint Chiefs' Operation Center, insisted that the search teams found "a bunch of military electronic equipment gear, and they shut the hatches down, pretended it wasn't there, and said, 'Pass Friend.' And he steamed merrily into Havana." In fact, the search team tried to examine equipment listed as "electromeasuring equipment" on the ship's cargo manifest, but they could not find an easy way to get access to the gear. "To examine the electromeasuring instruments would have required unloading tons of cargo," reported Reynolds, so "the decision was made not to undertake this effort considering the small weight and size of the electrical equipment as certified by the Bill of Lading." The freighter's chief mate told Reynolds that the devices were simple voltmeters. The remaining cargo consisted largely of sulphur, asbestos, trucks, and spare parts. The Pierce's commanding officer, Commander Joseph Foust, claimed that the search teams found no prohibited material nor any evidence that the cargo manifest had been altered. "She was nothing more than a floating spare parts shop."[21]

In spite of the enormous Navy effort to establish and enforce the blockade, during the entire Cuban Missile

Crisis Ward's 2nd Fleet stopped and inspected only one ship, the luckless Marucla. "It was little more than a stunt," said Dennison, "a demonstration that we were effective." Ward was directed to allow other suspicious vessels, including several Soviet ships, to proceed on to Cuba without interruption. The master of the Swedish ship Collangatta, chartered by the Soviet Union and carrying a load of potatoes, reportedly ignored attempts by an American destroyer to hail her on 26 October. "The navy signalled: 'Standby, what is your cargo?" according to General Burchinal's colorful account. "And he said: 'Go to hell!' Full steam ahead and right through the damn blockade." Two Soviet ships were within the quarantine zone when the blockade took effect, the freighter Leninsky Komsomol, carrying a load of crated Il-28 bombers, and the tanker Vinnitsa. Kennedy allowed both of them to proceed unchallenged into Cuban ports. Still another ship that was not stopped was the East German passenger liner Voiderfreund, although Foust, after intercepting her and examining her topside, sent several messages to Ward advising that she should be searched. He was frustrated when Ward told him to allow her to proceed. "They didn't stop the one we said they should [Voiderfreund] and they had us stop the one we said they shouldn't [Marucla]."[22]

The entire subject of command and control of the Blockade Force generated considerable heat and confusion at

the time, and thereafter confounded historians of the event. For instance, Graham Allison wrote that "for the first time in U.S. military history, local commanders received repeated orders about the details of their military operations directly from political leaders," thus circumventing the military chain of command and restricting the autonomy of local commanders. Allison was wrong. According to Admiral Dennison, the confusion arose in part because, in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, several agencies, believing their need for up-to-date information about international crises to be imperative, established their own situation rooms. "Everybody [in Washington] had a war room," he recalled, "and officers in these war rooms would call up on my command voice circuit to talk to commanders of ships or task force commanders to get information, not to give orders for God's sake!" The volume of meddling inquiries gnawed away at Dennison's patience, and he "finally protested and told everybody to get off my command circuit because they were interfering." Orders from the president were transmitted to McNamara and then to General Taylor, who in turn informed Admiral Anderson in Flag Plot. Anderson then called Dennison in Norfolk or, on occasion, communicated directly with Ward in the Newport News. "I know of no incident when civilian authorities gave orders directly to afloat forces," confirmed Captain Carmichael.[23]

Although Kennedy never bypassed the Navy's chain-of-command, he did closely monitor the quarantine operations from McCabe's Situation Room, where he could listen to the Navy's radio nets. "Everything that we did we reported directly by voice telephone, sometimes through a scrambler, to the Pentagon, which was monitored also in the White House war room," remarked Ward. This tight control, wrote Ted Sorensen, demonstrated Kennedy's "determination not to let needless incidents or reckless subordinates escalate so dangerous and delicate a crisis beyond control." While Sorensen may be overstating Kennedy's motives, Kennedy no doubt strove to keep the situation at sea under his control. The political nature of their mission was not lost on the Navy's high command, however. "For the first time we asked instructions on whether or not we should stop a Soviet ship," said Ward, who agreed with making the decision "at a political level because it was a political decision rather than a military one."[24]

McNamara also kept a close watch over naval operations and his behavior, or at least that of his civilian assistants, clearly annoyed Admiral Anderson. Relations between the Navy and the secretary of defense were none too good even before the missile crisis erupted. Except for James Forrestal and Louis Johnson, who served under Truman before the Korean War, McNamara's predecessors had been conciliatory compromisers who allowed the JCS to craft

strategy and permitted the individual service departments to arrange their own budgets and develop their own arms. Two attempts by Eisenhower to reduce inter-service rivalry and strengthen the hand of the secretary of defense, one in 1953 and another five years later, failed to arrest this trend. McNamara, however, was determined to test his legal powers to the full by centralizing authority within the Defense Department in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The importance of both the JCS and the service departments were diminished as a result, and the Navy in particular resisted McNamara's every move. Anderson's predecessor, Admiral Arleigh Burke, had tried to keep the friction over policy to a minimum, but he left office in 1961 feeling that "there was nothing that I could accomplish."[25]

Excepting LeMay, Burke was the last of the World War II-era heroes to occupy a seat on the JCS. By contrast, Anderson was hardly known to the public and lacked Burke's considerable reputation. Anderson also found himself hobbled by the fact that Kennedy used the secretaryship of the Navy to reward Vice President Lyndon Johnson's political cronies. John Connally, who served in 1961, spent most of his time in Washington running for the governorship of Texas, and his successor, Fred Korth, a Fort Worth banker, had no experience in naval affairs and too readily towed McNamara's line. By the summer of 1962,

McNamara and Anderson had already clashed over several important issues of strategy and policy, including McNamara's plan for the MLF, a multi-national fleet of Polaris-bearing NATO ships; the Navy's lessened role in McNamara's Flexible Response strategy; and McNamara's scheme to build the TFX, an Air Force-Navy fighter-bomber which Anderson, an aviator, stoutly opposed. In sum, on the eve of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the reservoir of ill-will between these two important American figures was already full.[26]

It was not long after Kennedy's televised address that the reservoir began to overflow. During the blockade operations, McNamara visited Flag Plot each evening at 2200 for a briefing on the situation at sea. Early on the evening of the 23rd, the night before the quarantine was to go into effect, he queried Anderson about the first intercepts to be made in the morning. Responding via memo, the CNO informed him that the first intercept would be made by the Essex hunter-killer group and Ward's flagship, the Newport News. Anderson did not mind keeping McNamara informed, but he was determined to prevent untoward interference with operations at sea, so he added that, "from now on I do not intend to interfere with Dennison or either of the admirals on the scene." McNamara, however, was apparently fearful that Anderson would permit unnecessary aggressiveness on the part of his surface

forces. "Our quarantine was intended to be a political signal, not a textbook military operation," he recalled, "and trying to get that across to the military caused a lot of headaches." By this time, most of the suspicious ships had already reversed course and were steaming away from Cuba, but a few vessels were still heading toward the blockade zone.[27]

Since some of them would approach the quarantine area on the morning of the 25th, McNamara, nervous and anxious, walked down to Flag Plot to ask Anderson about the locations of these Soviet ships. "Here comes Mr. McNamara down the passageway with his entourage, every cat and dog in Christendom that was on his staff, civilian and military!" recalled Captain Kidd, who quickly escorted the large group, which included Gilpatric and Korth, into the briefing theatre where he showed them the slides of the Soviet ships. "But that wasn't good enough, they wanted to see the actual plotting board." He moved the group into the main area of Flag Plot, but this, too, was not enough. There were "various expressions of surprise and disappointment on the faces of our leadership," he said, "because we didn't have, had never had, and do not to this day have a great huge space, a la the SAC control center" which identifies the positions of Soviet ships with moving red lights. McNamara's staff bombarded the watch standers with questions about the numbers of ships, the submarine

contacts, and the times of intercept, Kidd noted, but the group was so large that only a few could get into the watch officers' small spaces where "the pucks were stuck up magnetically and the best dope that we had realtime was reflected." Once this concurrent plot was explained, McNamara's group seemed more at ease, as they now had "a better appreciation that we really knew what the hell we were doing." Inasmuch as questions about submarines continued to crop up, Anderson politely told McNamara that the top secret submarine plot was located in the next room, but that it was off limits to most of the personnel in tow. "So the CNO pulled Mr. Mac aside, I mean it looked like a damn locker room in there, more people than you could shake a stick at jockeying for position, . . . and went into the back room."[28]

Several accounts of the crisis claim that at some point during this visit to Flag Plot, McNamara and Anderson engaged in a heated argument concerning the details of the intercepts to be made the following morning. McNamara reportedly quizzed Anderson on when, where, and how the intercepts would be conducted, questions Anderson had already answered during several briefings earlier in the week. The nitpicking questions wore away at the CNO, who, in a fit of anger, reportedly waved a copy of naval regulations at McNamara and shouted, "It's all in there." To which the secretary responded, "I don't give a damn what

John Paul Jones would have done. I want to know what you are going to do, now!" According to these accounts, Anderson, now red-faced, told McNamara and his entourage to "go back to your offices [and] the Navy will run the blockade!"[29]

There are conflicts in the evidence surrounding this encounter. There are discrepancies between McNamara's and Anderson's versions of what transpired that evening. Each portrayed himself as the one who was simply doing his job and claimed that the other one over-reacted. McNamara depicted himself as upholding the principle of civilian control of the military. Anderson claimed to be asserting his right to prevent McNamara from interfering with dangerous operations at sea. Anderson seemed particularly pleased to be seen as someone who had the courage to stand up to McNamara. Kidd, however, claimed that the shouting match never happened. "It wasn't famous at all," he said, "If everybody that has written about that instance was there, the damn building would have tipped over. Voices were raised, but predominantly from staff members trying to arm the secretary with questions." No, he continued, "there weren't any angry words between these men that night." It is doubtful that the encounter ever took place, but animosity and tension certainly prevailed. Anderson was annoyed by what he believed to be McNamara's meddling and nitpicking in a military matter. "He couldn't keep his

cotton-pickin hands out," he charged. McNamara no doubt felt he was acting within his authority and was only taking steps to ensure that the Navy carried out the instructions of the president, who "wanted to use the quarantine in a very precise way, for a precise purpose, and the military had not run a blockade that way before." Nevertheless, when rumors of the stormy encounter reached the White House, Anderson's upcoming reappointment to a second term was doubtful.[30]

"It would have been better," Anderson reflected some years later, "to have [controlled the operations from] the JCS command post in the JCS area" rather than from Flag Plot. To avoid a similar mob scene in the future, he immediately directed Kidd to establish a system of detailed briefing logs and to have them distributed to high-level officials in the Pentagon and the White House. "In those, we tried to have everything that those giants on the so-called Executive Committee might need to make a decision," noted Kidd. Updated every four hours, the numbered, three-ring notebooks contained "what we knew and what we didn't know." This included "operational situations and photos of the status boards" and information about the Cuban order of battle. Delivered by couriers, copies of the log books were given to Kennedy, Bundy, McNamara, Rusk, and Taylor, to name but a few. "What determined the number of books we could maintain? Very simple," Kidd said, "it was the

number of books that we could lay open side by side on the longest table in Flag Plot." Only Kennedy or his ranking military aide, General Clifton, could instruct Kidd to add or delete information from the log book. "If there was something the President wanted to know, we would put it in." What Kidd's log books could not tell Kennedy was what Khrushchev's next move would be, but the answer to that question came soon enough. [31]

Chapter Seven

The military situation was soon overshadowed by events on the diplomatic front. On the afternoon of the 26th, following the token search of the Marucla, the stage shifted rapidly from the Caribbean to Washington, where the first signs of a concession had been received from Moscow. Acting at Dobrynin's behest, but without Moscow's knowledge, Aleksandr Fomin, the KGB station chief, sought out ABC News' State Department correspondent John Scali and delivered to him an important proposal. It embodied a seemingly simple solution: should Kennedy promise not to invade Cuba, Khrushchev would remove the missiles. Scali hurried to the State Department where he found Rusk and told him about the clandestine meeting. Rusk instructed him to return to Fomin and convey the message that his offer had "real possibilities." The Soviets were working on parallel tracks, for late that evening the White House received a rambling letter from Moscow, which Khrushchev wrote himself, offering to pull the Sandals out if Kennedy agreed to "declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its troops and will not support any other forces which might intend to invade Cuba. Hopes for a quick settlement were soon shattered, however, when the next morning brought another message from Moscow, this one adding the removal of the Jupiters in Turkey to the earlier proposal.[1]

The crisis was now at a crossroads. Construction of the missile sites was continuing at a rapid pace, and the quarantine had so far had no apparent effect on Soviet efforts to make all of the sites ready for firing. The early morning CIA intelligence update on 27 October listed three of the four missile sites at San Cristobal and two sites at Sagua La Grande as operational. And the latest message from Moscow, by mentioning the Jupiters, placed Kennedy in the one corner that he desperately wanted to avoid. "We're going to be in an insupportable position on this matter if this becomes his proposal," he sighed. The Jupiters had only recently been installed, but Kennedy had already asked about removing them, only to meet with stiff opposition from the Turks and NATO headquarters. Robert Kennedy's claim that his brother "had ordered the forever dilatory State Department to get them out of Turkey" was incorrect. John Kennedy was alert to the problem of the Jupiters, and he had, in August, upon learning about Khruschev's scheme to deploy SS-4s and SS-5s in Cuba, instructed the Defense Department to study ways to remove the American missiles from Turkey. In all likelihood, he was thinking of a trade two months before the crisis of October. On 24 October, three days before Khrushchev suggested such a deal, Assistant Secretary of State George Ball cabled Ambassador Raymond Hare in Ankara and asked him to assess Turkish receptiveness to the withdrawal of the

Jupiters. Hare answered that the Turks steadfastedly opposed removing the missiles and, if asked to do so, would feel that "their interests were being traded off in order to appease an enemy." Thus, if Kennedy agreed to Khrushchev's latest suggestion, he risked trading the Cuban crisis for a Turkish one. Faced with this dilemma, he admitted that Khrushchev's demand that the United States withdraw the Jupiters from Turkey put him "in a pretty good spot. . . because most people will regard this as not an unreasonable proposal."[2]

Kennedy's circle later claimed that the Jupiters were obsolete, "antiquated[,] and useless" weapons, whose existence and vulnerability contributed little to Western defense and only invited a Soviet first strike. This argument was wholly bankrupt and inaccurate. Certainly, the Jupiters were obsolescent as compared to the second-generation, solid-fueled Polaris and Minuteman missiles, but the Jupiters nonetheless could deliver nuclear warheads to a Soviet target. Protected by a formidable Turkish Army, they were no more vulnerable to a landward attack than was West Germany, and their vulnerability to a nuclear strike was about equal to that of any other target in Europe. Moreover, the presence of the missiles clearly worried the Soviets, and they cringed at the thought of fifteen nuclear missiles under Turkish control. The Jupiters "scared the hell out of them," recalled the JSSC

admiral. But on 27 October 1962, the Jupiters posed a significant obstacle to solving the crisis. To avert a Turkish missile crisis, Kennedy decided to ignore the issue of the Jupiters and to reply to Khrushchev's first letter, which did not mention them. He agreed not to invade Cuba if Khrushchev withdrew his missiles from the island. A letter accepting this arrangement was drafted and quickly sent on its way to the Kremlin.[3]

Just when it appeared that a settlement was within reach, events took a dangerous turn. On the morning of the 27th, the White House learned that Cuban anti-aircraft had brought low-level American overflights under fire. The ExComm debated whether to order fighters to escort the next missions when Kennedy received word that a U-2 had been shot down over Cuba. The pilot, Major Anderson, was warned by an onboard detection system that a ground-based fire control radar had locked onto his aircraft, but the cumbersome, high-altitude spy plane could not outmaneuver the SA-2, and Anderson's aircraft was downed with the first missile from a Soviet-controlled SAM site near Banes. "He just couldn't shake it," recalled Steakley. Having been apprised already that this was possible, on the 23rd Kennedy had approved a contingency plan that provided for a retaliatory attack by Air Force or Navy fighter-bombers against the responsible SAM site, but he now balked at delivering the blow. Nonetheless, the U-2 shoot down

renewed calls from the JCS for an air strike on both the SAM bases and the ballistic missile launchers. Kennedy shrank from ordering in the strike force, however, as he was persuaded to give Khrushchev time to answer the latest American message.[4]

To underscore the gravity of the situation and warn Moscow once again in no uncertain terms, Kennedy sent his brother to tell Dobrynin that if "they did not remove those [missile] bases, we would remove them." But the attorney general also assured Dobrynin that the Jupiters, while they could not be mentioned as part of any public arrangement, were going to be removed anyway once the crisis was over. As night fell, the atmosphere at the White House was tense. There was no way to predict whether Khrushchev would agree to this deal. Kennedy directed McNamara to call-up to active duty twenty-four reserve Air Force troop carrier squadrons, which would be needed in an airborne drop on Cuba.[5]

If Khrushchev rejected the arrangement Robert Kennedy had explained to Dobrynin, then the president intended to take one more diplomatic step before approving the air strike plan. Kennedy was determined not to allow the issue of the Jupiters in Turkey to obstruct a settlement of the crisis. "We can't very well invade Cuba with all its toil, as long as it's going to be, when we could have gotten them out by making a deal on the same missiles in Turkey," he

said. "If that's part of the record I don't see how we'll have a very good war." He and Rusk, who had consistently stressed a diplomatic solution, devised a contingency plan. "He [Kennedy] instructed me to telephone the late Andrew Corier, then at Columbia University, and dictate to him a statement which would be made by U Thant, the Secretary General of the United Nations, proposing the removal of both the Jupiters and the missiles in Cuba," Rusk later wrote. It was an extraordinary card that did not have to be played, in part because the deal was struck that evening during another meeting between Robert Kennedy and Dobrynin.[6]

The following morning, Khrushchev retreated and accepted Kennedy's terms: removal of the missiles for a no invasion pledge -- and the removal of the Jupiters early next year. In order to speed the Kremlin's reply on its way, Radio Moscow carried the premier's message agreeing "to take appropriate measure to discontinue construction of the aforementioned facilities, to dismantle them, and to return them to the Soviet Union."[7]

The crisis then began to draw down. Ward's Blockade Force remained in position surrounding Cuba and preparations for an invasion continued. On the 30th, the destroyer Cecil reported that her quarry, a Soviet Foxtrot submarine, had surfaced after a chase lasting thirty-five hours. "When the submarine surfaced, it was on course 090

as prescribed by our instruction to Moscow of October 24," wrote McNamara's assistant, Adam Yarmolinsky, weeks later, perhaps indicating that Moscow had informed her submarine skippers of the American fleet instructions or had ordered them home shortly before the quarantine took effect. That same day, Kennedy agreed to suspend the blockade while U Thant went to Havana to try and convince Castro to allow neutral inspection teams to observe the dismantling of the sites. Castro refused, but American photoreconnaissance revealed the Soviet sites were being dismantled, so Kennedy did not object. But after U Thant's departure, Castro's rebuff prompted Kennedy to put the blockade back into effect on 2 November.[8]

Ward's next assignment was to ensure that all of the SS-4 missiles were taken off the island. An agreement with the Soviets was subsequently reached that allowed the Blockade Force to inspect the outgoing Soviet freighters carrying the ballistic missiles. On 7 November, the Soviet UN delegation provided Ambassador Stevenson with the names of the nine Soviet ships, their dates of departure, and the number of missiles each vessel would be carrying. No course, speed, or track information was provided, however. For reasons that are not altogether clear, the Soviet freighters failed to pass through the designated rendezvous points. "Don't wait," Dennison told Ward. "Find them!" Four days later, the nine Soviet merchantsmen had been

located and visually inspected by the Blockade Force to ensure that all forty-two of the SS-4s on the island had been removed. Kennedy ordered the quarantine to remain in effect until the Il-28 bombers were withdrawn as well. Castro, who looked increasingly like an insignificant pawn in the superpower match, steadfastedly resisted parting with the planes. At long last, Khrushchev persuaded his Cuban comrade to give up the bombers, and Kennedy announced this agreement on the 19th and the end of the quarantine the next day.[9]

While Kennedy's handling of the crisis drew high marks from many, the Navy's reaction was mixed. "It was a defeat," said Vice Admiral Hayward, "and a cheap success for the Soviets." Anderson agreed, believing that Kennedy might have pressed Moscow to retreat even further, and erred by handing Khrushchev "the concession that we would pull our missiles out of Turkey," and so "let the Russians realize that we really weren't as smart or as strong as they might have feared." On the other hand, Dennison felt that Kennedy "made a very wise decision in using naval power" and in not ordering the invasion. Ward, Rivero, and Kidd agreed. Rivero believed that "it would have been wrong for us to invade that little country." Acheson, who was thoroughly disgusted with the Kennedy brothers, attributed Kennedy's success to "plain dumb luck."[10]

For Kennedy, the crisis had not ended. The question

still nagged as to how to approach the Turks and tell them that the Jupiters were coming out. While the details of these negotiations are unknown, surely the Turks extracted concessions from Kennedy as the price of an agreement. This might have included increased aid and, perhaps, American support in the Cyprus question, a bitter conflict between Turkey and her Aegean neighbor, Greece. Clearly, Kennedy agreed to deploy one of the nine available Polaris submarines to the restricted waters of the Eastern Mediterranean to substitute for the Jupiters. According to Captain Kidd, the Navy had been studying a plan to deploy Polaris into the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean -- once enough boats were available. This was one aspect of a strategy designed to "stress" the Soviets and so force them to invest in air defense radars to monitor the southern hemisphere missile approaches to their home territory. Although the Polaris submarines usually attempted to blend into the ocean environs for the duration of their seventy-day deterrent patrols, Kennedy ordered the fleet ballistic missile submarine Sam Houston to pay a port visit to Izmir, Turkey, in April 1963 and to make herself visible, albeit briefly. Shortly afterward, on 25 April, McNamara reported to Kennedy that "the last Jupiter missile [in Turkey] came down yesterday [and that the] last Jupiter warhead will be flown out at the end of the week." The Cuban Missile Crisis was over.[11]

Conclusion

President Kennedy was alerted in early July to Khrushchev's plan to deploy nuclear-capable ballistic missiles in Cuba. Based on intelligence gleaned from communications intercepts, Kennedy learned that month of the fruits of Raul Castro's negotiations with Moscow. Inasmuch as this intelligence was probably suspect and came from a tightly-held source, Kennedy could not move immediately to thwart Khrushchev's scheme. Instead, he limited access to the information, prevented its dissemination to the wider intelligence community, waited for more publishable evidence of Raul's deal, and sought a way to deal with the dilemma. In the meantime, Kennedy, or someone in his circle, redeployed the intelligence ship Oxford to a position off of Havana to learn more about the status-of-forces agreement.

Although the naval high command was not privy to Kennedy's secret code name source, by late July the Navy possessed enough clues to understand that something was afoot. Routine Navy shipping surveillance revealed a large increase in Soviet shipping to Cuba in late July, and this alerted the intelligence community to an enlarged commitment to Castro. While most intelligence analysts did not believe that the arms shipments included ballistic missiles, the naval high command, including Admiral Anderson and his staff, clearly believed that that was

where the arms buildup was headed.

When the magnitude of the Soviet buildup became apparent in early August, the higher reaches of the adminstration began to stir. CIA Director John McCone independently concluded that the Soviets were shipping ballistic missiles to Cuba. Although privy to most of the intelligence on the Soviet Union, McCone was probably unaware of Kennedy's closely held secret. Thus, it is likely that the information on Raul's trip was the product of an NSA listening post in Turkey or Scotland, as this explains why McCone was unaware of it. McCone explained the evidence gathered independently by the CIA to Kennedy on 10 August and this resulted in NSAM 181 on 23 August.

McCone's concern was shared by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee in the Pentagon. After reviewing the available intelligence, the JSSC briefed the JCS and recommended that steps be taken to counter the Soviet shipments. However, General Taylor, the JCS Chairman, refused to convey the JSSC assessment to the president, perhaps because he believed that the evidence did not support their finding.

After the ongoing U-2 surveillance of Cuba fixed the positions of SA-2 surface-to-air missiles, Kennedy attempted to maneuver out of his dilemma. In a public message on 4 September, he denied that ballistic missiles were in Cuba and warned Moscow against stationing them

there. In addition, he sent Khrushchev a personal, written warning through Dobrynin. The note was delivered to Moscow via diplomatic courier, owing to communications problems experienced by the Soviet embassy in Washington, and Krushchev's reply, denying the charge, was announced via Tass a week later. This prompted Kennedy to react with yet another September threat.

The Soviet buildup in Cuba spawned a fierce, partisan political debate, which placed Kennedy in a vulnerable position. Scarred by the Bay of Pigs, he knew that Cuba was his Achilles' heel, and he wanted desperately to avoid another failure in the Caribbean, especially before the upcoming November congressional elections. In late August, Senator Keating began his campaign against the administration's inaction. The GOP offensive weighed heavily on Kennedy, who once more restricted intelligence on the buildup while discounting the evidence of ballistic missiles in Cuba by saying that the reports referred only to SAMs.

The growing evidence that ballistic missiles were in Cuba resulted in a flurry of late-September and early-October military preparations, work that has been ignored or misinterpreted by scholars as steps taken with the aim of invading Cuba. Admiral Anderson and General LeMay ensured that the air strike, blockade, and invasion contingency plans were brought up to date, and in early

October, Admiral Dennison ordered supplies and ordnance prepositioned to support his operational plans and readied the Atlantic Fleet for action. McNamara, heretofore reluctant to admit that ballistic missiles were on the island, finally reviewed these plans and informed Kennedy of their status. Thus, well before irrefutable photographs of the missiles were obtained on 14 October, the JCS was preparing to act.

On 16 October, Kennedy was handed his publishable evidence: positive photographs of Russian ballistic missiles in Cuba. Since July, he, and possibly he alone, knew of the Soviet/Cuban treaty to deploy ballistic missiles. This early warning was confirmed by the huge Soviet sealift, the Oxford's intercepts, and reports from CIA agents in Cuba. Yet, up until this time he had taken few steps to protect his administration or the country.

He delayed six more days before taking any action, while the ExComm discussions rambled on and the missiles sites were readied for firing. The available transcripts clearly show that his group was marvelously ill-informed of Kennedy's August steps, and was poorly briefed about the air strike, blockade, and invasion plans. The ExComm at length recommended a limited naval blockade, although it was unclear as to how this would remove the forty-two missiles already in place.

Several errors exist in the traditional interpretation

of the Navy's blockade of Cuba. Neither Kennedy nor McNamara circumvented the Navy's chain-of-command or issued orders directly to local commanders. Kennedy did, however, tightly control the blockade by issuing orders -- through the chain of command -- and directed Admiral Ward's Blockade Force to stop and search only those vessels that he personally selected.

The Navy's ASW campaign was also misunderstood. Kennedy knew that Soviet submarines might try to elude the blockade and carry nuclear warheads to Cuba. For this reason, and because the submarines menaced the gathering invasion fleet, he included them in his blockade order and later issued specific guidelines for dealing with them. Ward's Blockade Force conducted the ASW operations within existing peacetime rules of engagement, except for signalling procedures adopted for the blockade. Despite the contention from several scholars that the ASW campaign risked escalating the crisis, the chance of a clash between the Soviet submarines and the Blockade Force was slim.

A bevy of political scientists, and even a few historians, have compiled an impressive literature on the Cuban Missile Crisis, but every account draws heavily on the versions by Graham Allison, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. This study casts substantial doubt upon their work and suggests that Kennedy knew a great deal more than he admitted long before October concerning Soviet

ballistic missiles in Cuba. Yet, he did nothing to prevent the Soviets from shipping the missiles to Cuba and nothing to prevent the Soviets from preparing some of them for firing. Kennedy's behavior may be explained in two ways. One is that he simply did not know how to react, and so restricted the intelligence to a select few until he had the answers. But he failed to act when independent evidence came in during August and ordered a few studies to examine the dilemma only when prodded into action by McCone. A second explanation is that Kennedy felt that he needed tangible evidence to show the allies and the public, and that he did not possess this evidence until it was provided by the 14 October U-2 flight. But this fails to explain the rudderless direction and lack of preparation during the late summer, when he had ample time to devise a course of action that he could implement quickly -- once the missiles were photographed. Such steps were begun only in early October, when Admiral Anderson grew alarmed and readied the Atlantic Fleet for action. The overriding reason for Kennedy's October crisis, then, was his own failure to act earlier.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES

CINCLANT	Commander-in-Chief Atlantic
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
ExComm	Executive Committee of the National Security Council
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JFKL	John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA
NA	National Archives, Washington, D.C.
NHC	Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.
NIC	National Indications Center
NSACF	National Security Archives, Cuba Files, Washington, D.C.
NSC	National Security Council
NWCR	*Naval War College Review*
OAS	Organization of American States
OH	Oral History
USNA	Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD
USNI	U.S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, MD
USNIP	*U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*

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The library of literature on the Cuban Missile Crisis is immense. Primary sources of great value to this study include: the Cuban Missile Crisis files compiled by the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C., a wealth of documents concerning the crisis, from Mongoose to the ExComm; Commander-in-Chief Atlantic "CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis 1962," Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives (NHC); "Chronology of JCS Decisions Concerning the Cuban Crisis"; and "Personal History or Diary of Vice Admiral Alfred G. Ward, U.S. Navy, While Serving as Commander Second Fleet," NHC. The Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives, holds a large number of miscellaneous reports, operational orders, and summaries of the crisis. Additional primary source material includes the Oral Histories of Admiral George W. Anderson, Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Vice Admiral Alfred G. Ward, and Admiral Horacio Rivero, held by Special Collections, Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy. Also, a wealth of information was obtained from interviews and correspondence with over forty participants. Major General Chester Clifton, Captain James W. Foust, Admiral Charles D. Griffin, Vice Admiral John T. Hayward, John Hughes, Admiral Isaac Kidd, Jr., Commander Gerry M. McCabe, the Honorable Paul H. Nitze, and Brigadier General Ralph D. Steakley were especially helpful. Two individuals requested

anonymity: the admiral on the JSSC and the Analytical Research Division officer on the Oxford. Taped interviews with Admirals Anderson, Ward, and Dennison conducted in 1974 and held by Professor Love were also used.

Memoirs, diaries, and accounts by former Kennedy insiders include Robert F. Kennedy, Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Robert Kennedy and His Times (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978); McGeorge Bundy, Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years (New York: Random House, 1988); Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Nikita Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, trans. and ed. by Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); and Arthur Krock, Memoirs: Sixty Years on the Firing Line (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968).

Over one hundred books, periodicals, and dissertaions were consulted during the course of this project. The most helpful were: Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967); Raymond L. Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1989); James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink:

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